

FORBIDDEN APARTMENTS.

A TALE.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

FORBIDDEN
APARTMENTS.

A TALE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY
WILLIAM LINLEY.

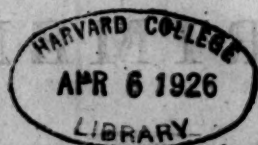
"Things just so strange, that though they never *did*,
yet they *might* happen."

SHERIDAN'S CRITIC.

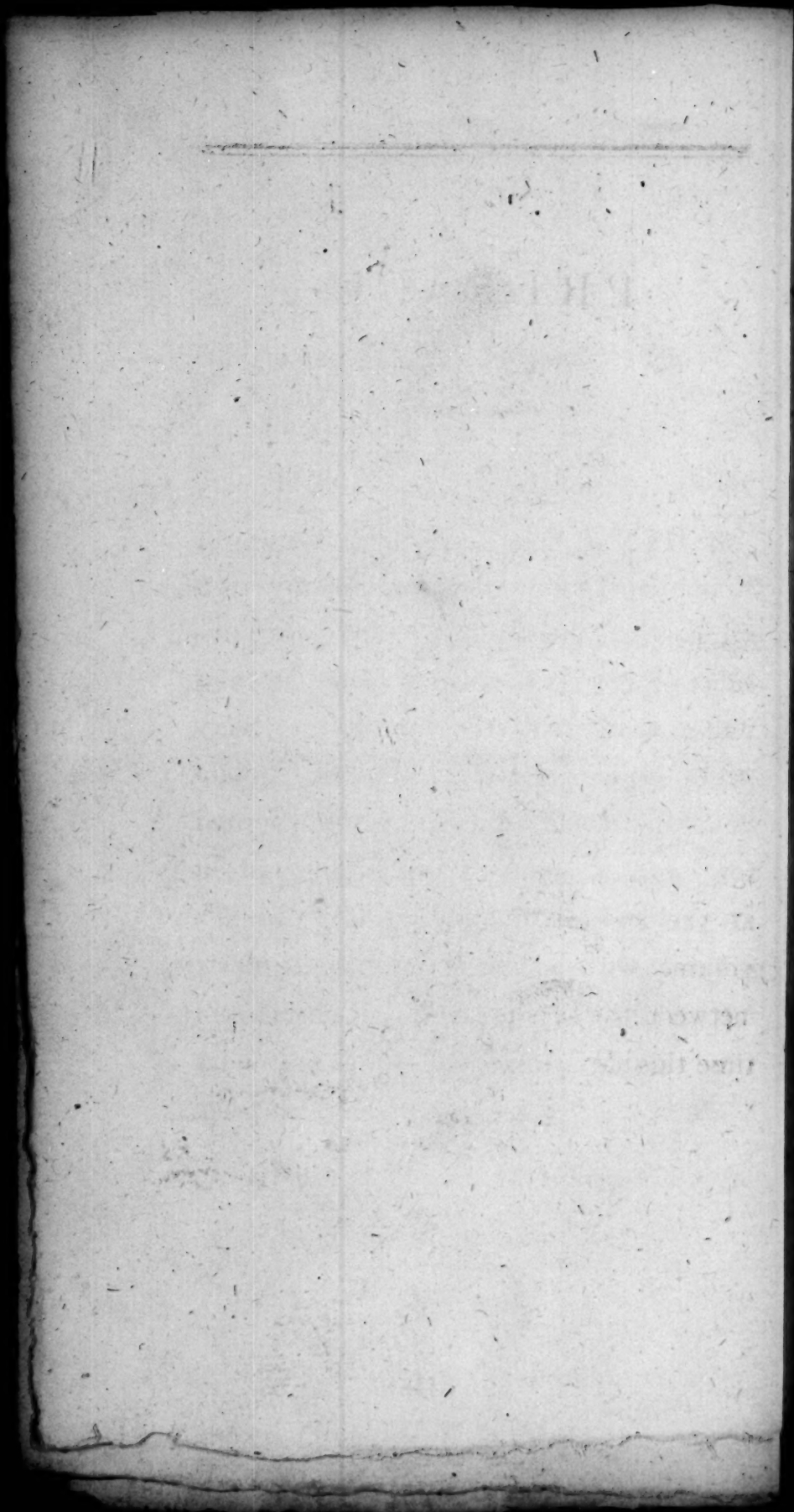
VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

WHEN I first thought of writing a Romance, I soon decided, in my own mind, that the attempt would prove unsuccessful. My reasons were strong; public taste required mystery in every page, and a ghost *in embryo*; unaccountable events satisfactorily accounted for; and a scrap of poetry introduced at the end, or in the middle of each volume with as much method as music between the acts of a Play. • The second time this idea crossed me, I was still more
A inclined

inclined to abandon it, from recollecting how effectually the subject of terror had already been handled by the powerful incantations of a Radcliffe, a Lewis, &c. &c. Still the inclination *haunted* me; and as I hate to be enslaved either by my own whims, or those of other people, I resolved at length to wave my feeble wand, not with the presumptuous hope of being able to call "spirits from the vasty deep," but merely to try whether any thing, in a "questionable shape," would make its appearance. My conjurations were not altogether ineffectual. Something did flit across my mind: as one night I lay in bed; but it was neither a Monk in a cowl—a dagger—or a devil. Being unwilling, however, to lose my phantom, such as it was, I started up, secured it, and locked it up in my present

present *apartments*, where I hope it will remain, unmolested, till the reader, in due time, releases it from its captivity. I must, however, entreat such as are principally governed by the *spirit* of curiosity, not to give the rein too much to expectation, nor suffer their own fancies to take the lead of mine. To say the truth, though I found little difficulty in shutting the door of these said chambers, yet I have been a long time preparing a *key* that I think capable of unlocking it, and am afraid the most considerate of my literary scrutinizers will be induced to find fault with the intricacy of the wards. In their dilemma I beg leave to recommend to their attention an observation, which I think may be of some advantage to me; namely, that the desire of being accounted

original, especially in the construction of a Novel or a Romance, is now rarely gratified within the limits of consistency. The stores of ingenuity have been exhausted in illustrating, by natural fiction, the virtues and vices of mankind, in improving the mind, and delighting the imagination; and if the dexterous poet can clothe his predecessor's idea in a new dress, it is as much as can be reasonably expected. If for nature be substituted bombast, and we are to allow consistency to be violated, then, indeed, originality may live for ever; learning and satire have, and may still assume the most preposterous shapes. If we look to Rabelais and Swift, we need go no farther. *New* monsters, *new* devils, *new* systems, *new* conceptions, and *new* languages may every day be made to lash new vices and
4 follies,

follies, which are multiplying every hour. Morality may be inculcated by the same means; the Tales of the Genii, &c. &c. may still be succeeded by stories of a similar nature; but the moral is sometimes lost upon the mind even of the most reflecting reader, while he is admiring or laughing at the monstrous absurdities with which they abound. But it is otherwise in a Tale, where the characters and situations are familiar to every remembrance; where calamities are sustained, which, by many of my readers, may have been really felt, and brought on by the same indiscretions. Then it is that the precept not unfrequently becomes the most interesting subject of consideration, and completes its intended good.

In

In this path I have presumed to tread; but as I have been likewise aiming at originality, let me hope to be excused an uniform adherence to rigid consistency; whilst [I promise to stick to the motto of my book, and write things "so strange, that though they never *did*, yet they *might* happen."] They may sometimes scatter an offensive ray, but which, I hope, will at no time obscure my moral. I have not, like most of our modern *magicians*, been so assiduously anxious to drain all the sources of wonder, pity, curiosity, and terror, as to have entirely forgotten this *attendant spirit*; and, as a great qualifier of these tumultuous sensations, I beg leave to recommend him. Now a word or two concerning Novels in general.

When

When I mention the names of a Smith, a D'Arblay, an Inchbald, a Radcliffe, and a Lee, it is not without the highest respect for their talents; but at the same time, I cannot help lamenting that one or two of these ingenious writers have so spun out their narratives, that a story has been made to drag through six volumes, which might have been related with much greater satisfaction to the reader in one. I shall not assign any reason for this; the motive may be justified. I will only venture to observe that a tale is more likely to become popular, and to preserve a lasting reputation, that is permitted to glide smoothly on without the constant introduction of new characters and incidents, unconnected with the main subject. The reader is better pleased when he has not political discussions intruded upon.

upon him, and is suffered to continue at home with the hero or heroine, without being in danger of transportation in every page from England to India, and from India to Italy.

It is impossible for the memory, however retentive, to preserve such a chain of occurrences; and nothing injures the interest and moral effect of any literary production so much as a perpetual reference to what has gone before; but a very dangerous consequence has resulted from these admitted digressions. Those authors, whose doctrine is pernicious to the cause of religion and truth, have taken every advantage of them, by introducing in their stories the most licentious scenes and conversations;—all the farrago of the new philosophy, and the more open

open blasphemies of the professed Atheist, would never have found the way to public attention, had they been left to shift for themselves; but artfully distributed in a Novel of *seven* volumes, of an amusing description, and from the pen of some very *amiable* writer, they must necessarily be perused.

In the following pages I have endeavoured to shew that it is from imbibing, at an early period of life, these fatal errors, that the heart is gradually weaned from every innate principle of virtue, and from every sensation of tenderness and humanity; that it is upon this foundation the needy villain builds his assurance of successful plunder; and that, before he can corrupt that *heart*, he must undermine the judgment; that vice must ever
be

be the forerunner of misfortune, and that misfortune will sometimes heal the wounds of vice.

If I have failed in my undertaking, I can only plead a first attempt, and *little* experience: I therefore must humbly entreat that most tremendous corporation of critics, denominated Reviewers, to spare me; as I honestly confess I have not fortitude sufficient to stand the terror of their rebuke, tempered though it be sometimes by the *consoling* hope that “their young author would try again.” I doubt I should answer them in like manner as Addison answered the sportsmen, who asked him if he would go hunting with them: — “*I have been,*” replied he.

THE

Forbidden Apartments.

CHAP. I.

THE ancient family of the Meritons may be traced from the reign of Henry the Second:—to the vicissitudes of fortune, but chiefly to that enterprising spirit of ambition which characterized it, may be attributed its downfall. Through successive reigns, this dangerous infatuation had alternately raised and reduced it, till

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B

milder

milder Governments, and a more civilized people, whilst they enriched the land by industry and commerce, gave birth to the nobler impulses of reason and humanity.

Respectability and happiness had, for a long succession of years, graced the walls of Meriton Abbey; and not till the period of the present history, had misfortune, the consequence of vicious principles, hovered over its battlements. This venerable mansion was romantically situated in a mountainous part of Devonshire, defended on all sides by thick avenues of trees, and commanding a wild and diversified view of the surrounding country; it had undergone frequent and considerable repairs, but with a caution that had not interrupted the original simplicity
of

of the building; it still retained the monastic appearance of feudal times. Spacious as it was, there had been but a small division of it appropriated to the uses of the family for many years; the other apartments had been casually examined, but generally so neglected, as to have fallen into total decay. Like most other buildings of antiquity, it bore the stamp of Monkish devotion, although the chapel had been entirely destroyed, and the cloisters contiguous reduced to a heap of ruins.

Sir Ashby Meriton had led the life of ease, dissipation, and pleasure. Misfortune had seldom dashed the cup from his lips, or imbittered its contents by a transient uneasiness; nursed in the lap of every indulgence, and born to the

B 2

possession

possession of a large property, his education had been a polished, but not an useful one. Books he had read, his genius had been playful, his understanding acute; but the opening pleasures of the world had directed his choice, and the doctrines of morality were but ill calculated to give splendour to the prospect. From this slight sketch of his youthful character, we must admit a lapse of forty years, and view him stretched on the bed of death! A second stroke of the palsy had reduced him to a condition from which no human means could extricate him:—his end was rapidly approaching, and the old servants of the Abbey were rendered almost inactive by their sorrows. A beautiful autumnal evening was drawing to a close, and the great bell at the outward gate of the Abbey had rung twice, when Sir
Ashby,

Ashby, opening his eyes, enquired who was there?—They were the first words he had uttered for several hours, and seemed to inspire his attendants with a hope they had not, since his attack, ventured to cherish. After a pause of a few minutes, he again said—

“ Pray leave me for a moment. Mr. Fordyce, you must not stir; to you, and you alone, I wish to speak.

The attendants withdrew, and left their beloved master with his friend. This was a gentleman of middling stature, and a commanding deportment; in his countenance benevolence, strongly tinged with the austerer virtues, was visibly engraved; and here and there, where age seemed to have commenced its attack,

a few marks of misfortune might be discerned.

“ It gives me sensible pleasure,” said he, in a low voice, as the servants left the room, “ to find you are so far revived, as to be able to speak on any subject; but as this should seem of importance, had it not better be deferred till you have recovered more strength?”

“ My friend, my brother,” replied Sir Ashby, “ I feel the hand of Death upon me; you are a philosopher, you are no flatterer; do you think I can recover?”

This was a solemn appeal. Mr. For-dyce looked embarrassed, dejected; he made no answer.

Sir Ashby continued.—“ In this situation,

tion, therefore, it behoves me to summon to my aid that fortitude which, I thank God, I still possess; and whilst the powers of reason are unimpaired, to make *some provision* for an only son, on whom my indulgence, I fear, has hitherto been too much lavished."

There was something paradoxical in this speech, which Fordyce could not avoid noticing.

Sir Ashby faintly smiled. — "You, in common with most people, my dear Fordyce, have given the general interpretation to my words; but why should not a fond father provide for the mind's welfare, as well as for the worldly enjoyments of his child? It is the affluence that George is heir to which I would guard him against :

the approaches of poverty to a heart like his would not come attended by a greater train of calamities. In him I view what I myself was at his age; but with a disposition, if any thing, less volatile, and with a temper certainly more even. I look back, with shuddering, at the evils I have escaped, and to which prosperity too early exposed me; and, Oh Eordyce! I had fallen—this bed, which I now contemplate with serenity, I had gazed on with tremulous horror, but that Lady Meriton descended, like my guardian angel, and snatched me from the precipice! To her I owe my present thoughts, my present tranquillity: had she lived, our child would not have needed a monitor; the path of virtue would have been the path of his choice: but thy will be done, just Heaven!”

The

The exertion overpowered the worthy Baronet, and he sunk upon the pillow. Fordyce, alarmed, was on the point of calling for assistance, when Sir Ashby recovered, and withheld him.

“ I must now,” resumed he, “ provide against these threatening evils. My son has never seen you ; he knows not I possess a friend—a friend of so much worth.”

Fordyce was affected ; he pressed the Baronet’s hand, but said nothing.

Sir Ashby continued.—“ You cannot be legally his guardian ; he is already older than I could wish him : but, Fordyce, you can be his friend, his adviser ;

B 5

and

and this I solemnly conjure you to be when I am gone."

"I will," replied Fordyce, firmly, "so long as I find one spark of virtue remaining; but—— He paused; he was fearful of intimating that he had doubts.

Sir Ashby pressed the subject no further.—"I am satisfied," said he, "George has many imprudencies, which to check, will demand your zealous and timely admonitions; but I think he will never be premeditatedly depraved."

The arrival of the physician interrupted all further discourse for this evening. There was yet something to be unfolded respecting *a provision*, which bore the appearance of mystery, and which Fordyce was anxious to be informed of.

Perhaps

Perhaps this gentleman was not the fittest of all Sir Ashby's friends for a task so difficult as the one he had imposed upon him; there was an austerity in his manner, a sharpness in his reproof, but ill-suited to bend a disposition, however flexible, that was free to follow its own impulses. Nevertheless, so strong was the bias to virtue and integrity in every word and action, that it commanded respect, and even admiration, whilst the charity and benevolence of his heart attached his friends to him by imperceptible degrees, and made the loss of his confidence and regard almost insupportable.

As the physician left his patient's apartments, Fordyce took him aside, and, with a trembling tongue, enquired after the Baronet's health.

“He will last, I think, Sir,” replied the Doctor, “till Mr. Meriton’s arrival; his pulse is better, and I have ordered him some cordials, which will at least prepare him for an easy departure.”

“You are of opinion then, Sir, that there is no ground for a greater hope?”

“I should not wish to encourage such an idea, Mr. Fordyce,” replied the Doctor, “at Sir Ashby’s time of life; I think his recovery to be impossible.”

Fordyce bowed, and retired to his chamber deeply affected. Early on the following morning, a letter came, addressed to his father, from young Meriton. He had received a summons to repair to the Abbey without loss of time. The letter therefore, and not his personal appearance, excited in Mr. Fordyce’s

breast sentiments little short of indignation. He was, indeed, so much shocked by this young gentleman's apparent insensibility, that he for some time hesitated whether he should deliver the letter to Sir Ashby, or not. He recollected, however, that it might but be the forerunner of his actual appearance; and with this hope, when he waited upon his dying friend, he conveyed to him, as gently as possible, the intelligence of its arrival.

Sir Ashby was visibly worse; he appeared, indeed, quite exhausted, and even Reason seemed to be rapidly forsaking her station. The report of the letter roused him to a momentary energy. "A letter, Mr. Fordyce! I am astonished! Is he ill?"

To

To this question Fordyce returned no answer.

“He was informed of the state of my health?”

“May I open the letter, Sir Ashby? We should not decide upon Mr. Meriton’s motives in writing till we know them.”

“Read, read,” replied Sir Ashby, impatiently.

Fordyce immediately obeyed, and read as follows:—

LONDON, SEPT. 4, 1772.

“*My dearest Father,*

“I dispatch these few lines, that you may be prepared for what might otherwise prove

prove too abrupt an appearance before you."

[Fordyce uttered an exclamation of satisfaction: Sir Ashby faintly smiled.]

"The news of your illness reached me while at dinner with my friend, Lord Delaval; need I say how severely I felt the shock? May Heaven watch over my father's life! I fly to assist, to comfort him!"

A murmur at the door prevented Mr. Fordyce from proceeding; it presently flew open, and Mr. Meriton was announced. The real love he bore his father, added to the fatigue of a long and hasty journey, had occasioned a transient paleness

ness over a fine complexion, and features particularly interesting and expressive; but there was a wildness in his eyes, that betrayed the prevalence of strong passions, and which was observed at the first glance by the penetrating Fordyce. In a moment he was on his knees, and bedewing with his tears his father's hand: to speak he was unable. Sir Ashby seemed to collect his whole fortitude for a last effort; he waved his hand for the attendants to retire; then drawing a small key from under his pillow, he requested Mr. Fordyce to open an escritoir on the table, and give him the contents. This was a roll of paper, carefully sealed up.

“Ere I entrust this to your care, my friend,” said he, addressing Mr. Fordyce, “let me introduce you to my son.

George

George, respect and love Mr. Fordyce; he is your father's dearest friend. Permit him to be the guardian of your youth; slight not the advice he gives you, but confide in him, as in me, and believe that, however his admonitions may counteract your own pleasures, they are advanced for your real and essential happiness. You answer not, George; is this request too hard from a dying father?

Mr. Meriton was overpowered; but suddenly recollecting himself, he advanced towards Fordyce, and catching him eagerly by the hand, "Whoever you are, Sir," said he, "give me your friendship. I know not why I have been so long debarred the valuable acquisition. Yes, my father, to your recommendation I bow with love and reverence."

Fordyce

Fordyce was disconcerted; but he returned with warmth the young gentleman's advances, and the Baronet pressed his son to his bosom, as the token of his satisfaction.

“ My dear George,” continued he, “ you have blunted, by this conduct, the dart of Death, and I shall meet the inevitable blow without shrinking. One request more, and I have done. You have hitherto been your own master, and you will shortly be still more independent. I have given you the free indulgence of your pleasures, relying on the natural good understanding you possess, and the power, in consequence, of discriminating between what we term the imprudencies and the vices of mankind. To vice, I trust and hope, you will never be prone; but

but the more you indulge in dissipation, the more you will qualify your mind to receive vicious impressions. Check, therefore, its ascendancy over your inclinations; and by sometimes turning your thoughts towards the instability of human happiness, in whatever way indulged, learn to despise the grosser enjoyments of life, and to relish those only which are promised in the life to come. I am aware, my dear child, of the difficulties you will have to combat, but I am equally aware of the necessity of this solemn advice. Mr. Fordyce has long been a resident abroad; he is but just returned, but he has seen the world:—he will be your monitor; he has knowledge to instruct, and judgment to foresee. The paper I now entrust to his care, is of the greatest importance; it relates to a *suite of apartments* in the
Abbey,

Abbey, which have not been opened for some years, and which join the western tower, and terminate in the wood behind. Those apartments—George, attend to my words—those apartments you must promise me not to enter, or even approach, till authorized by this gentleman.”

Fordyce started—Mr. Meriton looked surprised.

Sir Ashby continued—“Till the moment he says, *you may now enter them.*”

These last words were spoken with a solemnity which inspired in both hearers mingled emotions of wonder and awe.

“Here, Fordyce, is the key,” (drawing a large one from under his pillow); “take it,

it, and be assured that I have imposed nothing on your friendship but what a friend like you, and a virtuous man may execute.

Fordyce took the key with confidence.

“You promise me, George, that you will keep my last injunction sacred?”

“I will, Sir,” replied Mr. Meriton, “or Heaven forsake me!”

Sir Ashby instantly fainted; assistance was immediately called in; the physician at that moment arrived, but Nature had exerted her last effort: he spoke no more!

CHAP.



CHAP. II.

THE last duties to his deceased father having been discharged with every mark of the most unfeigned sorrow, Sir George Meriton took possession of the large estates to which he was heir;—besides the Abbey, was another seat in Hampshire, which had been purchased by Sir Ashby during his Lady's life. The house was built in the first style of elegance, and had been formerly the favourite habitation of the old Baronet; but with Lady Meriton died his love of almost every social pleasure, and

and the Abbey became, from that period, the residence of his choice, as the situation most congenial to his mind. Sir George used occasionally to make Bexfield (the name of this villa) his country abode during the summer. Sir Ashby had permitted him to call it his own; it had therefore suffered no injury from neglect, but, on the contrary, had been greatly improved under the management of its young master. The gloom of the Abbey was ill calculated to revive our hero's spirits; he recollected, however, the last admonitions of his dying father, and had resolved to try the force of retirement and serious reading, and how far they could, aided by the conversation of Mr. Fordyce, divert his attention from the vanities of life. To this gentleman he became more and more attached. The
solemn

solemn manner in which he had been introduced to him, the mysterious way in which a part of the Abbey had been for a time entrusted to his care, seemed to demand his respect and best affections:—even the austerity which marked Mr. For-
dyce's general character was, in some degree, pleasing to the young Baronet, for he had been already sufficiently satiated with the sweets of flattery; and the ingenious observations of a true friend, whilst they awakened his attention by their justness, amused it by their novelty.

Sir George had resided now three months at the Abbey, without expressing a distant intention of returning to London, or the least anxiety to receive the compliments and congratulations which had for so long a period been preparing
or

for him. Fordyce observed this with pleasure; he was glad to find that his young friend could receive, and even retain virtuous impressions; that he was capable, at times, of thinking seriously; and that, however he might hereafter deviate from the paths of discretion, he might, without much difficulty, be recalled.

One morning the Baronet had risen earlier than was his custom, and had been led, by a train of thinking, to a spot of ground, near which was a wing of the Abbey, so buried in trees and brambles, as to be almost inaccessible, yet constructed on a plan so simple and regular, that he could not help regretting it had not been kept in a better state of repair. Whilst he was contemplating the ruin time had brought upon this magnificent

pile of buildings, he observed Fordyce passing one of the arches. He started; he instantly recollected his father's mandate respecting the apartments on the western side; and fearful of observation, retreated hastily into the wood. Though innocent of having been led thither by idle curiosity, he was apprehensive his friend might suppose so, as he had never accustomed himself to take so early a walk.

At breakfast Fordyce appeared unusually thoughtful. Sir George himself felt rather embarrassed; but conscious of no ill intentions, he feared no reproaches.

“The morning is rather cloudy, my dear Sir,” said he to Fordyce, as that gentleman was perusing a letter he had just received.

received. "Do you think we shall have rain?"

Fordyce lifted his eyes from the letter to the window. "Not unlikely," replied he, and immediately returned to the epistle.

Sir George waited till he had done reading it.—"A letter from London, I presume: I hope not on any business that requires your presence there?"

Fordyce regarded him with surprise. "You speak of London, Sir George, as if you never meant to return thither yourself; my departure, I doubt, would very shortly be followed by your own."

"It would, Mr. Fordyce; for I confess I have not yet acquired sufficient philosophy to relish these scenes alone."

"True, but with me they give you pleasure?"

Sir George did not like the sarcastic manner of this rejoinder.—“ At present, Sir, I own I have experienced much pleasure from your discourse. The awful scenes I have lately witnessed, have, in some respects, rendered it pleasing to me. Sorrow is the greatest refiner of the heart—it extinguishes every spark of levity within it; but as that sorrow wears away, I cannot answer for the constancy of my present disposition; and life, and all its charms, may again shake it with irresistible force.”

“ A moderate indulgence in those charms, Sir George, the most exalted minds, at your age, and with your qualifications, can rarely withstand. With your propensities, and the connections you have formed, a temperance in the enjoyments of the world may be justly termed

termed a virtuous forbearance; for you have been open to temptations you have never thought it criminal to yield to, and with the ample means to gratify your desires, you have never been opposed in them by retrospect or consequence. Flattery you have never yet learned to despise, therefore you have thought every man your friend. Your situation heretofore was comparatively safe to what it now is; for you have now no father either to check an immoderate use of your affluence, or to advise a well-directed distribution of it. It behoves you, therefore, to be the more cautious, both in the choice of your pleasures, and of your friends. One way, indeed, there is to the temple of happiness, by which the wealth you possess may be usefully and virtuously employed,

and by which the snares of evil are safely avoided."

"Which way?" interrupted the Baronet eagerly. "By Heaven——"

"Hold!" replied Fordyce; "no sudden passions, no empty assertions—marry a virtuous woman."

Fordyce had touched the string of all his friend's doubts, objections, opinions, and difficulties. Sir George Meriton had long been the victim of illiberal sentiments respecting women; his vicious friends had convinced him they were in every situation attainable by stratagem, and fatally did he believe that stratagem to be lawful. The present emphatic reply demanded some notice; but Sir George was not the unsullied child of ingenuousness, and thought it politic on the present

sent occasion to disguise his real sentiments.

Fordyce saw all this, and prevented his observation.—“You do not like this way, I see. I am sorry for it; every other leads to destruction.”

“Why so?” replied Sir George, not sorry that his friend had sifted his real thoughts respecting marriage; “a life of celibacy——”

“As you would lead it,” interrupted Fordyce; “ridiculous! a life of delusive, abandoned pleasures!”

“You are severe upon me, Sir,” replied the Baronet, warmly.

Fordyce saw his error. “Pardon me, my young friend; where I love, my rebukes are sometimes premature. Come,

shall we walk? The mist is dispersed, and you have not been out to-day."

Here it was necessary to correct Mr. Fordyce, and yet Sir George would rather have let it alone.—"You are mistaken, Sir; I was abroad early this morning."

"Indeed! I am surprised I did not see you."

"I saw you," replied Sir George, unable to restrain his curiosity.

"I was probably then too much occupied by the prospect before me," returned Fordyce; "these hills, with the intermingling vales, are always novelty to me."

"It was not near that spot I observed you; chance alone directed me to the darker side of the Abbey, and I got entangled in a wilderness before——"

Fordyce snatched up his hat, and moved towards the door; he then turned
back,

back, and eyeing Sir George with the most scrutinizing regard, "Young man," said he, "you loved, you venerated your father; take heed how you break the promise you made."

Before Sir George could reply, the door was closed, and Fordyce gone. Sir George had frequently been tempted to gratify his curiosity, by making some enquiries of the servants respecting the forbidden apartments; but he prudently considered that, should any obscure hints be thrown out concerning them, they would only serve to inflame an improper desire to examine them, and which he knew he could not with honour indulge. He had therefore determined to think no more about them; but the foregoing circumstance entirely overthrew his resolu-

tions. That the most beautiful part of the Abbey should be denied its lawful possessor, and no reason assigned but what was clouded in mystery, appeared very strange; then Fordyce's agitation, on discovering they had been accidentally approached, and his dictatorial conduct in consequence, seemed to give a sanction to some enquiry, and he instantly summoned Morrison, the old butler, before him. This veteran had lived in the Abbey since the days of Sir George's grandfather, Sir Marmaduke; he was now in his 75th year, and had served the family with zeal and honesty from a boy.—“Morrison,” said Sir George, when the door was shut, “how long is it since the western side of the Abbey has been left to decay? Methinks the apartments belonging to it might have been kept in repair without

without much additional expence; and certainly they are not the least beautiful in the Abbey, to judge from their outside appearance."

"If your Honour had lately examined them with attention," replied Morrison, "you would have observed that they have undergone some trifling repair. Your dear father, when he received his first death-warning, as I may call it, had the western suite of apartments put into some order, and I took it into my head he was going to remove thither; but no—when they had been made tolerably habitable, he locked them up again, and always kept the key himself. This may be about four years ago, and I am sure nobody has been in them since."

"Were any of the servants ever suffered to enter those apartments before or after their repair?"

c 6

"Oh,

“ Oh, yes, Sir! and very often kicked up the dust in the long gallery leading to the tower.”

“ But after my father had taken possession of the key, he commanded them never to approach that side of the Abbey?”

“ No, Sir, he never laid any such commands upon us; why should he?”

“ Nay, I know not.—Why should he lay any such command upon me?” thought Sir George.

The following morning our hero received a letter from his most intimate friend, Mr. Selgrave. The character of this gentleman may be partly shewn by a perusal of his epistle, which ran as follows:—

“ *Dear*

“ Dear Meriton,

“ What the plague keeps you so long buried in the ivy of an old convent? For pleasure’s sake, and the sake of your friends, return—return once more to grace our social board, and revive the drooping spirits of some delectable girls, who are positively grown pale with grief at your absence. I applaud your filial love and respect for old Sir Ashby;—rot it, after leaving you such pretty pickings, “ he deserves a snug lying in the Abbey,” as my friend Sir Lucius says; and I don’t doubt but you have done every thing that becometh a dutiful son on the occasion. But consider, he is now incapable of receiving much pleasure from your presence, and there are innumerable living souls languishing for it here; therefore
lose

lose no time, but come among us again, if you would not have us all turn Friars, like yourself. Melbank says you are caught at last, and that some virgin of the Devonshire mountains has achieved what has been the daily endeavour of every spinster in London for these five years past; if this be the case, make short work of it, and I'll take her off your hands when you like. *Allons*, Sir George (egad, a title becomes you!), the winter is beginning to set in, and the town is preparing to receive you: Beauty smiles, Venus approves, and, as Horace has it, "*Nunc est bibendum!*" Thine for ever,

"CHARLES SELGRAVE."

LONDON, OCT. 28, 1772.

Such

Such was the friend to whom our young novice in the school of prudence and morality, was to return, to be confirmed in his faith and determinations: a man, whose whole life had been one continued scene of profligacy, but whose knowledge of the world had enabled him to gloss over the viler propensities of his nature, by assuming the thoughtlessness of youth, and a liberality of acting and thinking, which too frequently attaches the heart, when it ought to place it upon its guard. Sir George Meriton he had early marked for an easy prey, and soon succeeded in gaining his confidence; he discovered that his friend possessed, what is the general characteristic of unthinking youth, a nice and scrupulous sense of honour, added to a generosity of disposition, and a warmth of sensibility rarely to be seen.

The

The latter qualification stood a little in his way; for he reflected that, should love, and a consequent marriage ever take place, he would then lose many opportunities of imposition. To obviate this, his principal care had been to run down matrimony, by making use of the most specious arguments in favour of the indulgence of our natural affections and passions; and then to enforce a belief, which he saw had gained some ascendancy over our hero's mind, that the dispositions of all women were constitutionally changeable, that a virtuous conduct at home was but to prevent suspicion abroad, and that the most dissipated wife was generally the most constant. So strongly was this opinion rooted in Sir George's mind by his own and Selgrave's reasoning, that he shuddered at the very idea
of

of marriage, and sometimes even dared to doubt the purity of a mother he had been so much accustomed to revere.

In his present train of thinking, the above letter had not its intended effect; he put it up with symptoms of so much displeasure, that Mr. Fordyce took notice of it, and kindly expressed a hope that he had received no bad news from town.

“If any business calls you thither, Sir George, I will very willingly accompany you,” said he; “and indeed I would recommend to you, on other accounts, to revisit the capital; the system of moderation you seem inclined to pursue, will not be infringed by a participation in the pleasures you have been used to, provided you consider them as mere
amusements,

amusements, and not necessary to your real welfare and happiness."

Fordyce uttered this in a tone of unusual kindness, and it in some measure made amends for the pain the Baronet had suffered from the unfeeling remarks of Selgrave on his father's death. He replied that he had some thoughts of returning soon to London, and hoped Mr. Fordyce would accompany him. To this the other cheerfully consented, and orders were issued to prepare every thing for their departure in three days.

It is not fair to conclude that Mr. Selgrave had any hand in the Baronet's sudden determination. Fordyce had recommended his returning to London; and as Sir George had previously entertained

tained the idea, it is natural that the unexpected acquiescence of such a friend should be succeeded by an immediate preparation. To Mr. Selgrave's letter he returned no answer; and happy had it been for him, if the just indignation he felt, had induced him to drop this friendship altogether; but as his anger was easily raised, so was it as easily appeased; and long before he quitted the Abbey, he made a sufficient excuse for a conduct he had originally thought inexcusable.

The day now arrived which was to waft our hero once more to the scenes still most congenial to his heart. At breakfast Fordyce looked unusually grave; at times he cast a glance of affectionate regard upon the Baronet, mingled with distrust; and, as though he had anticipated

anticipated the misfortunes he was to undergo, the frequent tear would steal into his eye, which he in vain endeavoured to repress. Sir George took notice of this emotion, but said nothing before they stepped into the chaise that was to convey them to town. Fordyce took his charge aside, and addressed him as follows:—

“ You are now, Sir George, about to quit the seat of your ancestors—a mansion which has hitherto been undebased by vice, and unvisited by calamity ;—may you return to it, if ever you do return, as guiltless as you go, and may you bring with you that peace of mind you now carry away ! You have requested my company to London ; would you have done so, had I not previously offered it ? ”

“ Indeed, Fordyce, I should.”

“ To what end ? ”

“ That

“That I might fly to you in time of need, and follow or abandon such schemes as you might sanction or disapprove.”

Fordyce could not hear this declaration unmoved; he began to think he had formed erroneous opinions respecting this young gentleman, and the pleasing idea shot a transient glow of satisfaction over his fine, though pallid countenance. Pressing Sir George's hand, he continued—“The confidence you repose in me shall not be misused; I shall approve of every action that is prompted by a reasonable mind and an unvitiated taste, and will even be a partaker in such amusements; but you must not insist upon my living with you constantly: that conduct is not worth preserving which requires so much looking after, nor would I be a spy
upon

upon your actions. You will occasionally see me; and when you return to the Abbey, or to Bexfield, I will be always with you."

They now stepped into the chaise, which drove off with them, amid the tears and blessings of the servants and tenants, who were assembled to be spectators of their departure. During his journey to the metropolis, and as he drew nearer to it, many doubts and inquietudes took possession of Sir George's mind respecting his present situation. He saw himself the heir to a large property, with extensive and fashionable connections, and with a spirit and disposition to acquire a pre-eminence in the circle; yet did he find himself suddenly and unexpectedly entangled in a web of mystery and restraint.

To

To say he felt not an uneasy anxiety regarding the nature of his attachment to Fordyce, would be to say he was incapable of feeling the sensation; for what young man in his condition, and with his spirit of independence, but would have wished to free himself from the weight of those serious reflections, which such a connection must create, and hourly cherish? Sometimes he would tax his father with injustice, in having capriciously extorted a promise from him, which, had he been in the full possession of his faculties, he would have considered as an absurd exaction.

Unable to endure the conflict these reflections gave rise to, he broke silence, by demanding of his companion, in a jocular way, when he thought he might be permitted

mitted to enter the forbidden apartments of the Abbey. The subject had not been mentioned since it had been so abruptly dismissed in the breakfast-parlour.

Fordyce paused a few moments ere he thought of giving an answer to the question.—“I am sorry,” at length said he, “this subject preys so upon your thoughts; at present it is impossible for me to answer your question. I shall not probably live much longer, and then my consent will not be wanting to the accomplishment of your desire; in the meantime, you must learn to bear your anxiety with as much patience as I shall bear mine.”

“You!” replied Sir George.

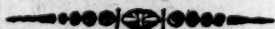
“Yes, I am as anxious to witness the effect of twenty years’ experience over
your

your heart, as you can be to explore the forbidden apartments of the Abbey."

"Then I must wait twenty years before—"

"I do not say that; but it is certain that our anxieties must cease together."

This last speech, though little calculated to clear the mist before the Baronet's eyes, yet plainly convinced him he had nothing to expect from further interrogatories, and that he must either violate his promise to a beloved father, and forfeit the valuable acquisition of Fordyce's friendship, or be content to submit the cure of his suspense to the mercy of time. He of course chose the latter; all further discussion on the subject dropped; Sir George having determined in his own mind not to resume, and, if possible, not to think of it any more.



CHAP. III.

THE compliments and congratulations so long due to Sir George Meriton were, on his arrival at his house in St. James's-Square, paid with interest. Folly and fashion immediately sprung forward to meet their old friend; and though they found him somewhat shy of their advances after so long an absence, yet his evil genius soon pointed out to them the way to regain their empire over his heart.

Selgrave

Selgrave had seen his error soon after the dispatch of his letter; but it was too late to recal it, and he had only to rally those qualifications of hypocrisy he so eminently possessed, against the arrival of his devoted friend. He soon succeeded, not only in disarming Sir George's resentment, but of binding himself, if possible, still closer to his regard. He observed the change in his friend's disposition, and adopted a language and behaviour consistent therewith. By slow degrees he could alone expect to wean him from the temperance he had almost been taught to prefer; and he adjusted his plans so artfully, that they entirely escaped suspicion. Selgrave was one of those men who prey upon the favourites of Fortune, and exult in the ruin they occasion. Sir George Meriton had always

been an object of importance ; and to see him so suddenly rescued from the trammels of vice, was more than he could afford. Had the Baronet been less wealthy, he might possibly have escaped ; for it was no easy matter to disguise a rooted depravity of mind in the society of a man like Fordyce. To this gentleman he behaved with so much modesty and reserve, that no suspicion was yet entertained of his designs ; still Fordyce instinctively avoided him, and wished, though he knew not why, his young friend had never known him.

His operations in the meantime went on slowly, but surely. Sir George had already dined, and re-united himself with his old circle of friends. On their first meeting, the rites of Bacchus had been celebrated

celebrated with rational cheerfulness; a second was given with less moderation; a third succeeded, and Sir George was *led* home. He had never been a great wine-drinker; Selgrave found it therefore an arduous task to entrap him in this way: yet it was a necessary step towards the accomplishment of his plans, as he took care to have company at his table, with whom the Baronet was not acquainted, and who would consequently make such a report of his intemperance, as would stamp his character as the same jovial fellow he had ever been. In the meantime, from wine Selgrave introduced him to women; not such as might disgust him by the grossness of their ignorance and licentiousness, but such as, with the fatal advantages of elegance and education,

might ensnare his heart, whilst they misled his judgment.

Fordyce, acute in observation, though deliberate in decision, had long witnessed a change, but had hitherto been silent. The storm of rebuke was, however, brooding over his brow, and ready to burst forth with all its dreadful consequences. One day the Baronet, inattentive to the respect due to his dearest and only friend, merely told his valet he should dine out, and left it to chance to signify as much to the rest of the family; in consequence of this, Fordyce, who had been that day riding, and came home rather tired and hungry, was told by the porter, when he enquired if Sir George was within, that he dined out.

“ Well,”

“ Well,” replied Fordyce, after a pause, “ then I suppose I may have my dinner immediately ; it is past the hour, and I am very hungry.”

What was his astonishment on being told that there was nothing provided, Sir George having signified his orders to that effect. Though this was a falsehood (for the Baronet had merely said he should dine out), yet Fordyce felt too indignant to enquire into the minutiae of what, in its best light, he could not but consider as a breach of respect, and even common good manners, to one too whom he had, but a few weeks before, regarded as his monitor and friend. To the servants who might, or might not, have been to blame, he did not deign to remonstrate ;

D 4

only,

only, as the porter was going to shut the street door, he said—

“ Pray call me a coach, and tell your master when he returns, that I shall dine out to-morrow.”

Fordyce now repaired to a coffee-house, where he feasted more upon reflection than upon what he had ordered for dinner. The inconsiderate and disrespectful conduct of the Baronet had destroyed the good effects of the ride, and left him without an appetite. He had called for his pint of wine, and almost finished the last column of a parliamentary debate, when the following conversation, from an adjoining box, arrested his attention.

“ Don’t

“ Don’t tell me, Melbank ; damn me if Meriton isn’t as jolly a dog as ever ! Why, at Selgrave’s, the other day, he almost knocked me up ; and if it had not been that I pleaded an assignation with Kitty Chirpington, I should have been the first under the table.”

“ Well, I don’t know,” replied the other, “ the change must have been somewhat sudden, for I dined with him myself not long ago, and rot me if he was not as formal as an old maid !—Ah ! thought I, it is a thousand pities such a fine young fellow, with such a dashing estate, should have been so spoiled.”

“ I’ll bet a guinea to a shilling,” cried another voice, “ he comes about again in a week ; he dines to-day, to my knowledge, with Lord Delaval, who means to

introduce him to a favourite sister of his *chere amie's*."

"Well," rejoined Melbank, "he is under great obligations to Selgrave; for, curse me, but he'd have been lost, if it had not been for him."

Fordyce could hear no more; grief, shame, and indignation rushed at once into his heart, and he arose from his seat with a precipitation that attracted general notice. Having paid his bill, he returned to St. James's Square, gave some orders to his servant, and then immediately retired to his bedchamber. Sir George did not come home till an early hour in the morning; he had been at the masquerade. The first object that presented itself, on his entering the hall, was Mr. Fordyce's servant cording a large

trunk, which he knew belonged to that gentleman; at the same time he heard a well-known voice exclaim—

“ Frank, make haste with the trunk! Is the chaise come?”

At that instant a postchaise drove up to the door.

“ Just come, Sir.”

“ Well, recollect, William, to give that letter to your master.”

Fordyce had now descended the staircase, and entered the hall. Sir George was standing by the fire; his dream of dissipation had for a moment forsaken him, and he stood before his indignant friend dejected and confounded. He did

not affect to misunderstand the nature of this hasty and unceremonious departure, and was only at a loss how to gain a respite at least from a separation so mortifying. He essayed to speak; Fordyce interrupted him.

“ Sir George Meriton,” said he, “ the reasons for my sudden departure you will peruse in a letter I have left with your servant; the present interruption I did not expect, but I must not be detained. Farewell!” and he moved towards the door.

“ Mr. Fordyce,” exclaimed the Baronet, in a frantic accent, “ you must not, you *shall not* leave me thus !”

Fordyce, with an air of inexpressible dignity, pointed to the parlour-door.

“ What you would say, Sir,” continued he,

he, "had better be communicated privately, and I must beg you to be brief."

He then walked deliberately into the room, the Baronet following with trembling steps.

"Now, Sir George, what are your commands?"

"Whilst you continue to afflict me with this coldness and formality, Mr. Fordyce, it is impossible for me to speak. Can this be the guardian that was to protect my youth? Does he thus fly from me at the first breach of his austere doctrine?"

"Rash young man!" replied Fordyce, "why will you continue to deceive yourself? It is not the mere ceremony of a temperate life that can ever make
you

you love it; with the means to indulge in vice, you must ever be vicious: for virtue you have not the sentiment to enjoy, and what advantage can accrue from a compulsory forbearance? Because I admitted the indulgence of innocent amusements, you have descended to gross sensualities; because I recommended a connexion with men of taste and information, you have associated with rakes and buffoons. Of what avail then can be my presence and my warnings to you, if your ears alone are open to my remonstrances? No, Sir George, if your mind be susceptible of change, if it ever can embrace the diviner particles of virtue, Misfortune alone can purify it, and to her severe instructions I leave you!"

"Yet stay, Fordyce; recollect I once said I would fly to you in time of need,
and

and you then consented to receive me;—
give me then one more trial, for I feel,
if you abandon me, I shall fall to rise no
more!”

There was a prophetic solemnity in this
appeal, that went to his friend's heart.

“At a distance, young man,” replied
he, “I can still observe you; and as you
reform, so will you draw me closer to
you.”

“Then stay and witness my immediate
conversion; for by that Power——”

“Misguided man! the very oath you
would thus precipitately take, is the
greatest proof of your fallibility. The
same passions that thus disqualify you for
all reflection, will hurry you into the com-
mission

mission of acts that must ever disgrace you; and till those passions are sufficiently quelled, every resolution you form will be frivolous and transitory."

"Then will my sincere endeavour content you?"

"May I depend upon your endeavour?"

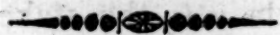
"You may."

A pause succeeded; during which Fordyce seemed to struggle with contending opinions. He walked with a hasty and uneven step about the room; but at length stopped, and turning to Sir George, took him by the hand.

"Young man," said he "you have made me break my resolution; may you be enabled to keep your's with less temptations to contend against."

Sir

Sir George kissed his hand with reverence, and they parted—Fordyce to take a morning's walk, and the Baronet to rest.



CHAP. IV.

DURING these events, Selgrave had been in the country, planning future schemes for his own accommodation, and his friend's destruction. The science of gambling had been amongst the primary attainments of this gentleman; and for contrivance

contrivance and dexterity therein, few could equal, and none excel him. To assist his powers, he possessed a happy temper of mind, which, when his advantage was in view, no disappointment could depress, or ill usage irritate.—The gaming-table was the stake to which he ultimately designed to lead his victim, and for this purpose he returned to London, not without apprehensions that he had already been brought thither by one or other of his vile associates. What was his mortification to find that the Baronet had neither called nor sent to him during his absence! This was a neglect he could not account for, as he had never intimated any intention of going out of town. For the first time he began to consider Fordyce as an obstacle necessary to be removed, ere he could prosecute

cute his designs with any success upon his charge.

The character of this gentleman was clear to Selgrave; and as he knew the firmness of his friend's heart, and that the suggestions of virtue are sometimes as easy of access there as those of vice, he did not long hesitate in attributing Sir George's present desertion to the right cause. To effect a separation appeared indeed a difficult task, as he was conscious that the Baronet had ceased to consider him so much in the light of a friend as a companion; and that the more he knew of Fordyce, the more he must respect him. He was ignorant of the obligations that bound them together, and how long, and at what period of life they had become acquainted. To part them,

them, therefore, by any aspersions thrown out against Fordyce's character, seemed to him an idle project; although, had he been better informed of the nature of their introduction, he would probably have made the attempt. Nothing, therefore, remained but to endeavour to mislead his judgment, and to strengthen him in the opinion, that all self-denial proceeded from political motives; that man was born to enjoy the pleasures of the world according to his several inclinations, and that vice was an ideal term, which the phantom Religion had conjured up to create difficulties, which would never otherwise have been known, and afflictions that would never otherwise have been felt. Thus, by making him err upon principle, he thought he might finally bring him to regard Fordyce either

as

as a fool or a knave; which opinion, in either case, would disqualify him from receiving further impressions from his conversation.

This ground being chosen, he went to work accordingly. His first interview was productive of coldness on one side, and affected surprise on the other. The Baronet, since his reconciliation with Fordyce, had studiously avoided his former companions; but this unexpected visit from Selgrave he had been obliged to receive, as he was standing at the drawing-room window when the other called, and could not deny himself without openly violating the truth.

“I am sorry, my friend,” observed Selgrave, after some indifferent conversation

sation had passed between them, "truly sorry that any part of my conduct should have excited your displeasure; the formality of your manner to one who really loves you, and has been accustomed to receive from you the kind welcome of regard, is as painful to his heart as it was unexpected. Open, as I hope I shall ever be, to conviction, inform me of my offence, and I will endeavour to make some atonement."

"Mr. Selgrave," returned the Baronet, "I do not know that you have intentionally meant to offend me, but that you have led me into dissipations, which were on the point of destroying my peace of mind, is most true; you know best your own motives."

"I do not deny the charge," retorted the other, "of having introduced you into
these

these circles of pleasure that I myself frequent; but that your peace of mind could have been injured by such indulgences, is to me incomprehensible."

"I do not wonder at your inability to solve the problem, Mr. Selgrave; that true happiness depends upon self-denial, and is destroyed by self-gratification, must ever appear paradoxical to men like you."

This was the very point to which the artful Selgrave wanted to lead him.

"My dear Sir George," replied he, "I now perceive the trap that has been laid for you, and into which your inexperience in the policy of the world was rapidly leading you."

"Hold,

“Hold, Mr. Selgrave, “I cannot listen to opinions——”

“Sir George,” interrupted the other, “you have the character of being a reasonable man; your education has been a good one, your understanding has been generally reckoned acute; you are therefore, I hope, above being prejudiced, and will not wantonly sacrifice, at the shrine of a received opinion, your own powers of discrimination.”

“I have no faith in those powers, Mr. Selgrave, though you have; and am content to think all other opinions fallacious that militate against the one you allude to.”

“Will you allow me, Sir George, to propose to you a few simple observations, and I solemnly declare I will pursue this subject no further? You admit that

Nature

Nature has endowed us with passions and affections; where would have been the crime of freely indulging in those passions and affections, if this *received* opinion had not constituted it one? What blood would have been spilt, or what tears would have been shed? The duties of life, the just dealings between man and man, are totally unconnected with it. Does the sun shine less bright for our enjoying ourselves? Shews Nature her livery less splendid? Whence do all the real calamities of life spring but from this mistaken idea? Jealousy, hatred, revenge, murder, and every species of misery have resulted from fanaticism; countries have been laid waste with fire and sword, which might have flourished in prosperity; and why all this? to convince us of the fallacy of all sublunary enjoyments, which

we hourly taste, and the true felicity of those in the next world, which we cannot comprehend. True happiness, you say, depends upon self-denial, and is destroyed by self-gratification. This is only a visionary happiness, and which you even purchase from a principle of selfishness, bartering one species of enjoyment for another. Were no reward in view, or had you no fear of punishment, you would not feel any happiness in self-denial, but you would feel it from self-gratification. Self-interest directs all men; and the very Priest, who preaches the doctrine of forbearance, would not perform his duty, were he not paid for it. No innate principle prompts him;—some men are covetous of wealth, others of fame; all are swayed by vanity. As vanity, therefore, is the cormorant that
must

must be fed, what signifies how? Mr. Fordyce, even he, your *disinterested* friend, what self-gratification does he not feel in being able to controul and subdue you to his will—in being able to command your respect, whilst he deprives you of pleasures he is himself scheming to enjoy? Has he no interest in this? Search your own heart; compare the circumstances of your connection; is he able to retract with safety the sentiments he has once advanced? No. Then it is his policy to fix you in them, that he may convert to his own purposes the fortune you possess, whilst he gratifies his pride, in being able to sway your actions and opinions. I have merely led you to those pleasures, which are in themselves harmless, and which I have equally partaken of; I have not frightened you with any

bugbears—your will was independent of mine; I have tempted you to the commission of no crimes; I never wished or sought to curb your inclinations, because I never yet saw them descend to meanness or depravity. Wherein, therefore, have I offended you? If I have laid myself open to your censure by an exposure of what you are pleased to term vice, it proves, at least, that I am no hypocrite. Mr. Fordyce looks into your very thoughts, comments on every action, whilst he wishes, in vain, his scrutiny should escape observation. Whence arises all this? That you bear to be a willing slave to it. Is there no mystery in this close observer?"

Sir George started; Selgrave saw his emotion, and continued—

"I think

“ I think, there is; and where there is mystery, there cannot be a good intention. For shame, my friend! Banish from a heart, formed to participate in the social charms of love and friendship, these imaginary glooms, lest they deaden in you all the feelings of a man, and yield you to an early grave the victim of bigotry and delusion.”

Sir George arose in great agitation, and walked to the window. Selgrave had unconsciously stumbled upon the very circumstance that could alone have awakened the Baronet's suspicion. The *forbidden apartments* now rushed into his mind, and filled him with uneasiness and disgust. Selgrave was satisfied with the effect of his pernicious discourse; he had now laid a foundation, rotten as it was, on

which he hoped to build with success ;—advancing, therefore, to his friend, he ventured to take his hand. The Baronet did not withdraw it.

“Sir George, I now take my leave,” continued he; “to lose your friendship would be a mortification I could but ill sustain; and I will joyfully regain it on any terms. I do not pretend disinterestedness on this occasion; I own, exclusively of my attachment to you as a man, I feel a pride in being admitted to your confidence. If what I have said, or may hereafter venture to advance, concerning our natural rights, after you have candidly investigated the subject—if, I repeat, you should deem my opinions frivolous, I shall be glad to profit by your objections; in the meantime, deal justly
by

by me, and do not be led to think me unworthy till you really find me so."

At that instant the door opened, and Fordyce made his appearance. Selgrave, without shewing the least embarrassment, made a slight inclination of his head, and withdrew. A long pause succeeded, during which our hero suffered the most unpleasant sensations. With a temper equally unsuspecting and unsteady, the assumed sincerity of Selgrave had left an impression upon his mind, that not even the presence of his monitor could efface. What had been insidiously advanced, by which he was induced to think he could enjoy the wishes of his heart upon principle, sunk deep therein, and harassed him with a thousand doubts and perplexities; then the opinion upon disguise and mystery, so

strongly corresponding with his own, greatly contributed to unsettle his reason and his resolution.

Three weeks had gone by since his reconciliation with Fordyce; during which period he had been moderate in his pleasures, and attentive to his domestic concerns; his temper had been even and mild, his conversation amusing, and his company respectable and select. What alarm, then, to his real friend, who had been accustomed to meet him with cheerful spirits, and an unclouded brow, to find him not only in company with a man he concluded had for ever been discarded from his confidence, and even acquaintance; but who had left him disturbed by frettings and agitations he did not attempt to conceal.

“What

“What devil,” exclaimed he, in an exasperated accent, “jealous of the only happy moments you have ever enjoyed, has, in the person of this specious villain, been molesting you? Beware, Sir George, beware! Shake him off, or I cannot save you; resist the temptation he has thrown in your path, and resolutely spurn it from you. Do this, and return once more to virtue and to happiness; if you will not, take *him* to your bosom, but take *me* no more!”

In the present state of our hero's mind, this austerity had not its wonted effect. Selgrave had artfully tempered his reasonings with mildness and moderation; he had frequently paused to give his auditor an opportunity of making remarks, if he chose it, upon what he had said, implying

a wish to be corrected if he were wrong. He had warned Sir George not to be frightened by bugbears, or terrified into conviction; and all these circumstances had now their full weight. The severity of Fordyce's rebuke had been, on the contrary, always unpleasant, and frequently disgusting to him. His opinions had been advanced to him not merely as opinions, but truths, that he did not chuse should be contradicted; and the Baronet's replies had always been treated with an indifference bordering upon contempt. To the present warning, therefore, he did not return an answer either conformable to his friend's wishes, or even his expectations.

"Mr. Selgrave called, Sir, to apologize to me for any offence he might have been
guilty

guilty of towards me," said the Baronet. "As I had abruptly dropped his acquaintance without assigning any reason, I hope you will allow that his curiosity at least was not altogether unreasonable. If you have observed that I struggle under any uneasiness, perhaps causes may be found to justify it, wherein this gentleman can have no concern; but of this assure yourself, I do not court his acquaintance, nor have I invited him to renew his visit. Should he call again, the common civility due from man to man will prevent my shutting the door in his face."—So saying, he left the room, and in a manner that confirmed Fordyce in his worst apprehensions.



CHAP. V.

FORDYCE had resided with our hero much longer than was his original intention, probably because he found his presence would be longer required to confirm him in the principles he wished to inculcate; but he now saw that there existed difficulties in the way, which would at present prove insurmountable. In the meantime the Baronet was imbibing large potions of those fatal principles which were to destroy him. Contrary to his expectation, Selgrave had not repeated

repeated his visit. This gentleman was well aware that his slender stock of arguments was alone too frivolous to sink deep into the Baronet's mind, although they might strike for the moment;—he therefore had recourse to books, which he was confident his friend had never read, and probably never heard of; and by dexterously interweaving other men's opinions with his own, preserved the same style, whilst he made use of their united strength of persuasion.

With this force he began a correspondence. Sir George read, replied, and was overruled. The imperfections of his nature were encouraged to rebel, and his sensual appetites to return; fresh reasons were again advanced, and admitted; virtue at length gave up the contest; his
understanding

understanding was convinced, and Selgrave recalled. Had Fordyce suspected a correspondence of this nature, he would have been glad of the opportunity of confuting every argument that was advanced; but he had no idea that a man, whom he considered only as an idle, dissipated libertine, could lay a scheme of such dexterous villany—a plan, the execution of which demanded both assiduity and ability. Had the Baronet here made Fordyce his friend, and shewn him the letters, he would not only have satisfied him of the fallacy of the principles themselves, but have exposed Selgrave to his derision and contempt. Sir George was soon effectually prepared to renew a life of dissipation. He had nothing now to apprehend from Fordyce's reproofs, for he had been taught to despise them; and
although

although he never intended to insult him by any open manifestation of his disregard, yet he was resolved to pay little attention to any thing he might say. Cards of invitation to public routs and suppers were now distributed about without rule or reserve. Meriton House became the asylum for idleness and extravagance; an additional number of servants were put in employ, and a *kept mistress*, the object of future convenience, as the only thing wanting to complete a fashionable establishment.

The rational, the dignified, the virtuous Fordyce had, for a few weeks, been paying a last visit to a dying relation in the country. Sir George took the advantage of his absence to commence his career. A large assemblage of fashion had been
invited

invited to partake of an entertainment, as luxurious as it was expensive; every delicacy that could be procured enriched the side tables; the spacious rooms in his house were, on this occasion, decorated in a superior style of elegance, and pictures had been previously hung up, among which were some from the pencils of the most licentious masters; the subjects captivating to the fancy, and executed to a nicety bordering on disgust.

The evening was far advanced, and the mingled buz of dissipation was freely circulating through every apartment, when the door of the great room suddenly opened, and Mr. Fordyce was announced. Sir George, who was on the point of opening the ball with a young lady of

ton,

ton, involuntarily started. Selgrave saw his confusion, and stepped up.

“What, Meriton,” said he, in a rebuking whisper, “not yet reconciled to this scarecrow? For shame!”

Motionless with grief and wonder, pity and anger stood the friend of Meriton.

“Bless me!” exclaimed a lady at a card-table; “I vow you are all uncommonly silent on a sudden.”

“Faith!” replied a Lord, “I don’t wonder at it, for positively that gentleman’s *entré* has filled us with the most fearful apprehensions, lest he should prove to be old father Time come to mow us all down with his scythe. ’Pon honour, I
never

never saw a truer emblem of misery."—A loud laugh.

Whispers and insinuations now went round the room without reserve. Fordyce's appearance, indeed, was by no means calculated to inspire respect from so fashionable a circle: his dress was at all times plain, but now very much disordered from the fatigues of a long journey. Selgrave at length, with an effrontery well suited to his character, approached him.

"Come, Mr. Fordyce," said he, in a familiar tone, "for Heaven's sake, unbend your brow, and assume a countenance better suited to the humour of the moment;—there are times when I can be serious as well as yourself, but really

I see

I see neither the wit nor the moral obligation there may be in discarding the smiles of cheerfulness altogether."

"The *good*, Sir," answered Fordyce, solemnly, "are often most cheerful when they appear to be most serious; but the gravity of men like you is gloomy and corroding—the faithful mirror of an afflicted conscience! Call you these forced grins, these convulsive distortions, call you these the smiles of cheerfulness? Have you ever seen the beautiful face of Nature, have you ever breathed the pure air of Heaven, and can you view with pleasure this disgusting mummery, and bear this compound of pestiferous smells? Why yes, you may relish them, Sir, for you are in your element."—Then turning to Sir George, with a firm, but milder voice, he proceeded:—"For you, unsteady

unsteady man," (and the tears trembled in his eyes), "I came to snatch you from this ruin, but it is too late; yet I am bound to you by an indissoluble tie, and ere you sink under a load of misery and guilt, may stretch forth my hand, and try at least to save you."

He then majestically quitted the room, leaving the company to pursue their nocturnal revelry. It did not last long: spite of the zealous tuition of Mr. Selgrave, his pupil was deeply affected by the last solemn address of his friend. Virtue began once more to struggle for an admission into his heart, and he beheld every thing about him with loathing and detestation. The effect of Fordyce's speech upon his mind was soon perceptible to the company, who thought it prudent to disperse,

perse, and leave him to his meditations. The crafty Selgrave alone remained; he had foreseen what might be the consequence of Fordyce's return in the midst of all this pomp and extravagance, and had provided accordingly. Sir George had informed him of their first disagreement, and he rightly judged that a second must be followed, either by Fordyce's immediate departure, or some very important submission on the part of Sir George. To prevent, therefore, the possibility of this submission succeeding, he again had recourse to stratagem. In the Baronet's library was one bookcase for the accommodation of Fordyce's own books; in some of which he had accustomed himself to make marginal notes, and blank leaves had been added for the purpose of introducing some general observations on set
parts

parts of the author. As this library was free of access, Selgrave had taken an opportunity of stealing a book out of the collection above mentioned; and being in possession of this, he was enabled in a short time to imitate not only the handwriting, but the style of Fordyce, in case a forgery of either or both should ever be necessary to the accomplishment of his designs upon Sir George; on the present occasion it had been attempted, and fatally succeeded.

Our hero, almost overwhelmed by a conflict of contending passions, had retired into an adjoining room, where he sat and walked alternately. Selgrave remained in the drawing-room, waiting the return of reflection; he was roused at length by the following emphatic words:—"Yes, 'tis

'tis not too late: I will go and humble myself before him; I will solemnly abjure this hated life; I will retire with him from this abandoned town; he will receive me again to his bosom, and I shall be happy."

"Whither would you go?" replied Selgrave, arresting his steps as he rapidly entered the drawing-room.

"Villain, away!" retorted the Baronet; "thou hast planted thorns in my breast, that will for ever torture me; thou hast sowed the seeds of corruption there, and they have blighted every opening blossom of returning peace."

"A friend, Sir George," resumed the other, "will overlook the sallies of a blind and ungovernable rage. Prove me the villain you have called me, or your accusation is offensive and unjust."

"If

“If you think it so, Sir,” replied Sir George, contemptuously, “I shall not refuse to contest the point with you.”

“Unfeeling man!” retorted Selgrave, “you will soon be convinced of your error. Return to your Abbey; there, whilst infatuated by the miserable delusion of a fancied paradise, Fordyce and his invisible associates shall pamper on real pleasures, and revel in private on your sacrificed fortune.”

Sir George, during this speech, had cast his eyes upon the net which had been spread for him. A letter on the ground, between the door and the gallery, from which Fordyce had entered, attracted his notice; he saw a direction, but could only distinguish the well-known hand; he took it up, it was unsealed, and the

direction tempted him to open it. Scarce had he perused three lines, when the blood forsook his cheeks; he trembled, and read again.

“Gracious Heaven!” exclaimed he, “surely it is impossible! yet here he entered. This is beyond question his hand! Would you think it, Selgrave, that Fordyce could be a villain—nay, the very villain you have described him? But then my father—could he have been so blind to knavery? Read, read, and decide!”

Selgrave read the following words:—

*Copy of a Letter on Sir George Meriton's
Affairs, to S. M. D.*

“ I have succeeded, my dear D. ; the Baronet is our own. Young and credulous, he has already imbibed the milk of bigotry and prejudice, and I expect to tell you, ere long, that he has renounced the dissipations of this world, and is returned to the Abbey to prepare himself for the next ; in the meantime, I expect you to meet me at S. where we may plan some scheme for securing the *superfluous dress*. The other day I was apprehensive of a parting ; but you know my way ; it has deceived older men than him. More when we meet.

Your's truly,

E. FORDYCE.”

APRIL 4, 1773.

In

In this artful epistle two circumstances were introduced, which confirmed Sir George in his belief of its being genuine. The first was, that the date of the letter corresponded with the time which Fordyce had made it known to him that he was going to visit a sick relation, which relation, he was satisfied, must be the above-mentioned D. ; the other was an allusion to older men whom he had deceived, and among whom it was natural for him to include his father.—Selgrave, although he could not dive into the mystery of Fordyce's connection with the young Baronet, had been sufficiently informed of his intimacy with the old one.

“You do not appear to be surprised at this letter, Mr. Selgrave?” continued Sir George.

“ With the sentiments I have always entertained of the writer and his motives,” answered the other, “ how can I be surprised? That he is thus palpably detected, is certainly some satisfaction to me; because I doubt not but it will open your eyes to conviction, and induce some friend, more fortunate than I have been, to watch over your fortune, and guard it from these worst of ravagers, who, under the mask of religion, impose the severest penalties; and whilst they enjoy the fruit of their hypocrisy, make their votaries the objects of their laughter and contempt. Good night, Sir!”

“ Stay, Selgrave, I charge you; I may have been to blame; you must forgive the impetuosity of my temper.”

“ I have forgiven it, Sir George; my regard for you cannot be easily extinguished;—

guished;—but you seem to think I have been an ill adviser, and I would wish to profit, by the example of others, in the art of gaining your esteem, unfettered by suspicion.”

“Your reproaches are just, but my affection for this man was planted in my breast by a father I loved with the tenderest affection. The more I reflect upon this circumstance, the more I am astonished at his perfidy. Selgrave, we are now inseparable,” and he caught his hand; “I see the precipice from which I should have fallen. Away, then, with idle fears; again I am the youthful Meriton, and Selgrave is again his friend.”

A bottle of wine sealed the contract of reconciliation, and the morning had begun to dawn before they parted.



CHAP. VI.

NOTWITHSTANDING this sudden change in his sentiments respecting Fordyce, Sir George was not altogether free from embarrassment, and even dread, at the idea of meeting him at breakfast. He had retired with an intention to repose; but the incidents that occupied his thoughts soon made his bed the most restless situation he could have chosen. He arose, therefore, earlier than the rest of the family, to indulge his reflections in
the

the fresh air. For the first time it struck him that the fatal letter he had seen, might be a forgery; but then the circumstantial evidence was not strong enough to confirm him in this opinion. On the other hand, there appeared no ground for a suspicion of any person, and especially not of Selgrave; for where should he procure a letter of Fordyce's, or any other close specimen of his hand-writing? Fordyce had always shewn an inclination to avoid him, and had of late abruptly left the room whenever he made his appearance. He himself had never corresponded with Fordyce, and only knew his hand from occasional copies of letters he had seen relative to the late Sir Ashby; besides, was it likely that Selgrave, the gay and, as Sir George supposed, unthinking Selgrave, could so exactly time the bring-

ing forward such a fraud? How was he to know of Fordyce's return? or what reason had he to suspect so sudden a revolution from it in his own sentiments? No, the truth was apparent; and he returned to St James's-Square with a determination to accuse his monitor to his face. But what was his confusion and disappointment on being told that Mr. Fordyce had been gone ever since five o'clock that morning.

"Gone!" exclaimed Sir George, "whither, and how did he go?"

"In a postchaise, Sir," returned the servant."

"Well, Sir, to what place is he gone?"

"That, Sir, I cannot tell."

"Blockhead!

“Blockhead! why did you not make enquiry? Did he leave no message for me?”

“None at all, Sir.”

“Well, send Lovel to me.”

Lovel had lived long in the service of the old Baronet; he was a middle aged man, of an ingenuous and open countenance, and whose attachment to his late master, and faithful services for the space of twenty years, had much endeared him to Sir George. Mr. Fordyce had taken a particular fancy to him, and bestowed upon him frequent marks of his bounty. This preference had not escaped even the incurious Sir George, and it now gave birth to very unfavourable suspicions of this faithful domestic. He thought it probable that Lovel had been bribed to

assist Fordyce in his designs against him; and on his approach, endeavoured to detect in his countenance some disorder that might justify these suspicions. In this, however, he was disappointed.

“Lovel,” said he, as he entered the parlour, and bowed respectfully to his master, “how long have you known Mr. Fordyce?”

“Ever since he came to visit Sir Ashby, Sir, at the Abbey, and which may be about a year and a half ago.”

“You have lived in the family twenty years; did you never see him at the Abbey before?”

“Never.”

“Do you know any circumstances relative to the suite of apartments in the Abbey, terminated by the western tower?”

“I do,

"I do, Sir, and some very curious ones."

"Indeed! relate them."

"A few years, Sir, before your worthy father and my dear master died, he had those apartments put into repair; and the tower itself (which seemed to have been designed for a small chapel, for there is a great deal of painted glass in the windows, which are quite Gothic) was cleared of the dirt and lumber, and made fit for any body to live in, Sir. Well, whilst these repairs were going forward, Sir Ashby would sometimes come down to look after the workmen; and one day, when every thing was almost finished, he brought along with him a roll of paper, which he read over to himself as he walked over the apartments, and now and then, Sir, heaved a deep sigh;—at length

I heard him distinctly say (for he was too much wrapped up in thought to observe me in the room), 'Perhaps my suspicions may prove groundless, but I think it is very likely. Fordyce will be in England by the time.'—Then seeing me, he checked himself, and put the paper in his pocket."

"Amazing!" exclaimed Sir George.—
"How were the apartments furnished? Did nothing in them strike your particular observation? Nothing in the chapel?"

"Nothing at that time, Sir. The pictures, that had formerly been there, were all replaced, as was also the furniture, except that which was quite gone to decay. Well, Sir, the next day the workmen had completed their job; the apartments were immediately locked up, and the key from that
time

time kept by the old Baronet himself to the day of his death."

"And to whom did he entrust it then, and also the care of the apartments? you know, do you not?"

"Do not you, Sir?"

"No prevarication, Lovel!"

"Well, Sir, they were, I know, entrusted to the care of Mr. Fordyce."

"But you are ignorant of any thing else, I presume, that was entrusted to him?"

"I am, Sir."

"Do the other servants think you know of this *prohibition*?"

"Prohibition, Sir; what prohibition?"

The Baronet had artfully made this blunder; it convinced him of Lovel's sincerity.

"Poh!"

"Poh! I mean the charge entrusted to Mr. Fordyce?"

"Yes, Sir, I am pretty confident they do."

"Have you ever heard whether Mr. Fordyce was, or had been in any profession?"

"No, Sir."

"Well, Lovel, I am now going to repose some confidence in you, and take care how you abuse it. I have received undoubted proofs of that gentleman's villany; and it is made clear to me, that all the means he has been using to overturn my reason, and flatter my inclinations, have been to carry on a plan for appropriating my wealth to the purposes of his own gratification, and that of his accomplices. You have lately been honoured with a great deal of his conversation;

sation; and I command you, as you love your late master, and as you value me, to tell me whether any proposals have been made to you to turn against me, or whether you know of any snares which might have been, or still are spreading for me, to involve my peace of mind or fortune?"

"As I hope for mercy," replied Lovel, "I am ignorant of any thing that is going forward either against your happiness or fortune!"

The task of an inquisitor was by no means an agreeable one to Sir George; he had no reason to be dissatisfied with the answers Lovel had given to his enquiries; and although he had seen him start at the term *villany* being applied to Fordyce, and was pretty clear some conversation had passed between them, yet,
upon

upon the whole, he acquitted him of any evil designs, and expressed himself satisfied with his conduct. Lovel was now dismissed, and the Baronet sat down to the most unpleasant breakfast he had for a long time tasted. The mystery of the western tower became now a matter of the most serious consideration with him. It was true his father had laid the most solemn injunction upon him not to enter the apartments; but then, on the other hand, he had reposed his confidence on a man who had abused it, and he thought such a discovery sufficiently released him from the promise he had made, and would warrant an immediate breach of it. Then again he recollected he had called on Heaven to witness the engagement he had made; that an oath so solemn was not to be violated with impunity, and

that no positive, though very presumptive evidence had appeared to criminate Fordyce, whom still he could not bring himself to believe so culpable as appearances had made him. After various struggles, he resolved to be guided by his friend Selgrave, to whom he determined to open his whole heart, and acquaint him fully, not only of the mystery of the apartments, but also of the papers entrusted to Fordyce's care, and which were so strongly connected with them. He accordingly dispatched a letter to this gentleman's chambers in the Temple, requesting his company to dinner. Selgrave, though engaged to dine elsewhere, did not think it prudent to neglect the present summons so soon after the affair of the preceding night; he therefore came at the hour appointed, and was
rather

rather surprised to find his friend over a book, and only two plates laid at the dinner-table.

“Heyday!” exclaimed he, “*en famille*, as I live—a book and a boiled leg of mutton, I suppose. Well, if a wife does not follow, the devil’s in it.”

“Prithee, Selgrave,” replied the Baronet, “a truce with all joking for the present; I have something very serious to communicate to you, and I wish to have your opinion and advice upon the subject.”

“Well, my dear Sir George, you know that I am always happy in an opportunity of evincing my regard for you; but I think, if the discussion be likely to last, we had better commence it with a bottle of wine after dinner.”

The

The proposal was assented to, and dinner served up. The Baronet was thoughtful, and ate little. Selgrave endeavoured to amuse him with the news of the day, plans of fashionable entertainment, and local *bon mots*; but Sir George seemed to reap very little pleasure from his officious loquacity, and could not avoid drawing a comparison in his own mind between his present associate and the good Fordyce, between the sober persuasive observations of the one, and the flippant volubility of the other.

The cloth being removed, and the servants withdrawn, the Baronet acquainted Selgrave with every circumstance relative to his father's death, from his first interview with Fordyce, to their arrival in London; and concluded by asking him
whether,

whether, after what had come under his observation of that gentleman's character, and which it was but fair to infer Sir Ashby could not have known, he did not think he might with honour recal his original promise?

Selgrave, without the smallest hesitation, and greatly to our hero's surprise, gave it as his opinion he could not. To this decision he had been induced by two very weighty reasons; the first was, that he soon perceived his interest would in no shape be forwarded by the breach, as he concluded no additional supply of money could result from it; and on the other hand, by making his credulous friend believe that his objection proceeded from a nice regard to his honour, he knew he would have a better title to the

Baronet's

Baronet's future confidence and esteem. His curiosity had indeed been excited; but he could not afford to gratify that at the hazard of losing his prey. He well knew that whatever evil might be the consequence of entering the chambers, he, as the adviser and approver of the outrage, would be the first to be censured, and finally discarded."

"No, Sir George," observed he, "though I admit the reasonableness of your curiosity, and that Sir Ashby might have been originally instigated to that prohibition by some sudden caprice (a natural consequence of old age), yet your promise, so solemnly given, and at so awful a moment, the *laws of honour* forbid you, on any account, to violate. I hope you will not be displeased that I
thus

thus offer an opinion contrary, perhaps, to your wishes and expectations; but it is the duty of *true friend* to be a check upon the man he loves, in his thoughtless career, and not the obsequious pander of his will."

This speech had its desired effect. Sir George, whilst he renounced his design, was fully satisfied of his friend's disinterested conduct."

"I believe," said he, "Selgrave, you are right, and I am obliged to you for your candour; yet still I am amazed to think Fordyce should voluntarily continue to keep me in suspense, that must now be useless to him, since his designs upon my fortune have been thwarted. The copy of the letter, too, must long
since

since have been missed by him, which, as he will naturally conclude I have seen, will prevent him from any attempt at a reconciliation."

"Believe me, Sir George," replied the other, "he would not have accepted the trust but upon pretty sure grounds. Whatever secrets are contained in those apartments, whether intrinsically valuable, or otherwise, he means to make you purchase them one time or another; and, faith! I think it is but fair that you should pay for your credulity."

Their conversation was now interrupted by the arrival of Lord Delaval, the Nobleman we have before mentioned.

"Wheugh!" whistled his Lordship, "what d'ye call this? Breakfast, or an
afternoon's

afternoon's luncheon? And what mischief have you two been hatching together? Selgrave, I don't know how it is, but I never see thee *tête-à-tête* thus with an unsuspecting youth, like my friend George here, but I think of a cloven foot and a pair of horns; you'll excuse the association of ideas, Charles."

"Willingly, my Lord," replied Selgrave, who, nevertheless, did not seem above half pleased with the remark; "and I hope you'll excuse me, when I tell you that I never see your Lordship, that I don't think of a motley coat and fool's cap."

"Ha, ha! well retorted, old Crabtree; I forgive thy impudence for the sake of thy wit."

"And

“ And I your dulness, my Lord, for the sake of your title,” replied Selgrave.

My Lord began to think he should have the worst of this dispute, so changed the subject.

“ George, you look inconceivably miserable. What, hav’nt you got the ghost of last night out of your head yet? Lady Panic and my sweet little Betsey Flurry vow positively they must give up your acquaintance, unless you promise he shall be laid against your next *fête*.

Apropos, Baronet ! I mean to take compassion upon that girl ; she begins to look as “ pale as her smock,” as the black fellow in the play says, for want of a little fashionable attention. Selgrave, don’t you think I shall be successful?”

“Not altogether, my Lord.”

“And why so, pray?”

“Because I think the girl has some understanding, and is not quite deficient in point of taste.”

“Oh, confound your sarcasms! I know you think me a dangerous fellow.”

“Yes, when you have got your dragoon’s sword in your hand, which you don’t know how to manage.”

“Come, come, Delaval,” interrupted the Baronet, “Selgrave is too much for you at a rebuff. Will you have some dinner?”

“I can’t stay; I promised to dine with Jack Darnley, who is in town, and we go to the Opera in the evening. I came to ask you if you’d be of the party.”

“With all my heart,” replied Sir George; “Selgrave, will you join us?”

“Willingly,

"Willingly, on condition you dine with me to-morrow."

"Enough said."

"I don't ask your Lordship," continued Selgrave, "because I know you'll come of your own accord, if you can't please yourself better elsewhere."

"Certainly," replied the Lord.



CHAP. VII.

FROM this period we may date our hero's gradual decline; every succeeding day teemed with some fresh instance of folly and licentiousness. The fickleness and carelessness of his disposition exposed him to impositions of every kind, whilst his constitution was receiving hourly shocks, and his property gradually falling into the possession of sharpers and table sycophants. Kept mistresses had, by turns, occupied a place in his affections; but

but disgust, the common consequence of such connexions, had followed repeated enjoyment, and he now began to pant after more refined pleasures, in the deliberate seduction of innocence and virtue.

Selgrave, by indulging his humours, whilst he affected the greatest anxiety for his happiness and honour, soon gained such an ascendancy over him, as left him entirely at his mercy. Already had large sums of money been lavished away on pleasures which his dear friend had procured him, and at the gaming-table, over which he had long presided. In proportion as Sir George's wealth was decreasing, Selgrave's was accumulating; he now began to calculate the period of the Baronet's destruction, and the moment when he should leave him to struggle by
G 3 himself

himself in the gulf of wretchedness, into which he had plunged him.

Among the very few who ventured to remonstrate with Sir George on his conduct, was his faithful servant Lovel. Since Fordyce's departure, he had been uncommonly attentive to all his master's schemes and humours, and had, by degrees, worked himself entirely into his confidence. Whilst in the pursuit of any pleasure which led him into intemperance or extravagance, Lovel, whilst dressing his hair, would sigh and say—

“ Ah, my dear master! why did you quarrel with Mr. Fordyce? Had he been your adviser, you would never have thought of such a scheme as this.”



To which the Baronet would reply—

“No, faith! but he might, perhaps; and I might have been picking my fingers in the meantime over a *memento mori* at the Abbey.”

Sir George, in the midst of all his dissipation, had not yet lost either his good-nature, or his generosity; these occasional reproofs of Lovel, therefore, were never thought impertinent, and were sometimes even impressive. In the dissolute college, of which our hero had long been a leading member, the conquest over a virtuous woman's affections and principles was always a subject of the highest panegyric, and the successful seducer honoured with some distinguishing mark of respect from the whole fraternity.

Sir George was not, however, aware that, in order to achieve this great exploit, a certain quantum of hypocrisy and lying was absolutely necessary. On consulting Selgrave, he strenuously advised him to forego such a pursuit; not from any motives of rectitude, we may naturally conclude, but because his own interest had nothing to do with it.

“Your abilities, Sir George,” said he, “do not turn that way; you have not yet learned to lie and dissemble (indispensable qualifications in a man of gallantry); nor do I think you have perseverance enough, admitting you were possessed of all other requisites, to stand out so long a siege. No, no, be satisfied with those kind-hearted wenches, who have sense enough to laugh at the silly prejudices

prejudices of their grandfathers and grandmothers, and who yield perpetual variety of enjoyment, without subjecting their friends either to trouble or danger."

Sir George, indeed, had not been accustomed to dissemble; an early love of truth had been so strongly planted in his heart, that his own feelings would at present have betrayed him in the attempt. Selgrave's advice, therefore, was, for the present, followed; but not before he had reconciled his vitiated mind to the fairness of practising deceit towards a defenceless woman, upon the principle that the sex were not qualified to decide upon their own happiness, and that deception was necessary towards removing the prejudices that fettered their inclinations. Real love our hero had never felt. Within

the sphere he had lately moved, he could not expect to find its chaste and modest attraction. The indulgence of a sensual appetite on the heated bed of pollution was all the love he knew; he had never exhaled the pure breath of Beauty, or reclined his head on the bosom of Innocence. Nature had, indeed, endowed him with a disposition to relish such enjoyments, and Fortune had supplied him with the means of procuring them; but he had contaminated the one, and dissipated the other.

Rosara Courtland was the only daughter of a Clergyman, residing upon his small living in Hertfordshire; a man declining into the vale of years, and whose life had been spent in exact conformity to the sacred profession he had chosen.—

Cheerful,

Cheerful, communicative, and without suspicion, he had imbibed none of those morose principles which too frequently disgust, when they are intended to inspire love and respect. In his pulpit he was serious without being pompous, instructive without being obscure;—at home he was easy, affable, and hospitable; his charity knew no ostentation, his prudence no parsimony. Mr. Courtland had, in the year 1769, buried an amiable wife, who left him one son and one daughter. The son was at the present time finishing his education at Cambridge, and was intended for the bar; the daughter, the delight and comfort of her father's days, remained with him at home. Her education had been simple and feminine; and as Nature had endowed her with a lively imagination, and a good understanding,

she had begun early to taste the beauties of the sister arts, and had plucked the tenderer flowers of literature without venturing to approach the greater field of science. Untainted by any affectation, her manners and discourse were graceful and engaging; her temper was mild and equal; her preferences warm and artless; in person she was not too tall, and delicately shaped; her features were not so regular as expressive, her complexion exquisitely fair, and gave a brilliant animation to her captivating countenance. Yet this tender flower, fostered in the bosom of every gentle virtue, was doomed to feel the chilly hand of sorrow; the roses were to wither on her cheeks, and the tears of anguish were to dim her eyes. Misfortune had prepared for her a
bitter

bitter potion, and Love had spread for her his most baneful snares.

Business of importance had called Mr. Courtland to town ; and as he seldom visited the metropolis, he thought the opportunity of indulging his lovely daughter in a few of its amusements, was too fair to be neglected. Delighted at the idea, the unconscious Rosara accompanied him on the wings of rapture and expectation. Her father carried her the first night of their arrival to Drury-Lane Theatre, when the beauty of the structure, the magnificence of the scenery, and the variety of the performances, made her imagine herself in fairy land ; nothing short of enchantment could, she believed, produce such a variety of fascinating objects. The effect they had upon her countenance,

always beaming with sweetness and animation, attracted universal notice; her's was, however, too intent upon the scene before her to mark this, although her father did, and more than once felt a little embarrassed. As our unfashionable strangers went to see the play, and not to be seen themselves, they had gone early, in the hope of procuring a good seat in the pit, Mr. Courtland's favourite part of the house;—in this expectation, however, he was disappointed; for long ere the commencement of the play, the pit was quite full, and they were obliged to content themselves with a second row in an upper box. Thus situated, though under the protection of her father, it was impossible for Miss Courtland, all beautiful as she was, with Nature's colouring on her cheeks, and innocence, couched in
every

every smile, to escape regard, or even molestation.

When the half price came in, with all its usual train of tumult, intemperance, and licentiousness, she was assailed on all sides by impertinent observers. There are some men, who, after tiring themselves with revelling at the shrine of Bacchus, experience surprising novelty of delight in calling up, by some indecent whisper or insinuation, the blush upon the face of Modesty. To a couple of these noxious insects poor Rosara was indebted for her full portion of confusion. Unfortunately for her, her father, being a little deaf, and almost as entirely taken up with the performance as herself, did not hear them—a circumstance which they attributed either to design or fear ;
and

and thus continued their sport with such aggravating insolence, that, overcome by her apprehensions, she actually fainted away.

Sir George Meriton at that instant entered the box; he had been contemplating Rosara for some time in another part of the house; her beauty had at first attracted his attention, and the simplicity of her dress and manners had rivetted it. He had seen two young men talking to her in a familiar way, and concluded at first they were her friends; but when he observed the emotions of her countenance, the bashful timidity of her expressive eyes turned towards every other object but the authors of her persecution, whose loud and insulting laughs sufficiently explained the design they were upon,

upon, he darted like lightning to her assistance, and rushed in time enough to save her from falling backwards. Enraged, beyond bearing, at the brutal behaviour which he plainly saw had caused this accident, he turned fiercely to the two offenders, and threw his hat in their faces, at the same time observing that they were a couple of infamous cowards, and deserved to be caned round the lobby. The two heroes, upon this, wisely retreated; nor did they attempt to dispute with the Baronet upon a point which had been so clearly proved, a few minutes before, to the surrounding spectators.

Mr. Courtland had long been recalled to the situation his daughter was in by the disturbance around him. She had already revived in her father's arms as Sir
George

George returned with a glass of water, which he respectfully presented to the lovely trembler. She received it at the request of her father, who, turning to the Baronet, thanked him warmly for the protection he had afforded his daughter.

“I am, however, Sir,” said he, “very much alarmed at the consequence of your generous interposition.”

“I beg, Sir,” returned the Baronet, “you will be under no apprehensions on that account; no men, with the slightest pretensions to the character of gentlemen, could possibly have been guilty of such an outrage, and with any other description of persons I am not obliged to have any correspondence.”

Peace.

Peace being restored, the play proceeded, and Rosara's animated attention soon returned. Our hero had now free scope to indulge his observation of her charms; the more he gazed, the more he was fascinated. Women like her he had seldom been accustomed to regard:—in Miss Courtland he beheld vivacity without levity, reserve without prudery, and, still more astonishing, beauty without paint. From whence could she come? and by what powerful art could she make herself thus captivatingly handsome? Where were the magical touches of the friseur, the attractive embellishments of the jeweller, and the indispensable decorations of the milliner and mantua-maker? Without these, how was it possible to inspire admiration? yet the airy, the fashionable Sir George admired and loved; he,

he, like the rest of his giddy and dissipated companions, was ignorant of the powers of Nature. Accustomed to dwell with, and patronize her torturers and despoilers, he was astonished to see her thus suddenly appear in her original form, unconsciously graceful, and simply elegant. Perplexed as he was, and unprepared for serious conference, his heart told him he could not fly from his present situation; he felt emotions there he had never felt before, and began to wish himself away; but it was too late—Fate had begun her operations, and bound him down to fulfil her irrevocable decrees.

The fourth act of that impressive and admirable tragedy of the Gamester, had left Miss Courtland bathed in tears. She could but ill sustain even a fictitious representation:

representation of domestic woe, and for some time lost the power of recollection. Our hero seized this opportunity of renewing his discourse with Mr. Courtland.

“You appear, Sir,” said he, “to be deeply interested in this play; it is undoubtedly a very fine one, and more particularly calculated to call forth our sympathy, as it abounds with incidents not only natural in themselves, but very common in the present circles of society.”

“God forbid!” replied Mr. Courtland, greatly shocked. “I had hoped that this dreadful infatuation had already drawn down the completest punishment of Heaven; and that its severe examples had been, through Providence, effectual in preventing further destruction.”

Sir

Sir George had felt the anxiety of a caster at hazard; he had often been disturbed at the frantic blasphemies of the loser, and the vociferous exultations of the winner.

“It is a propensity,” replied he, “that should not certainly be too freely indulged.”

Mr. Courtland fixed his eyes upon him with a scrutinizing regard.

“It should not, Sir, in my opinion,” replied he, “be indulged at all!”

The reproofs of Fordyce rushed at that moment into the Baronet's mind; he remarked, for the first time, that Mr. Courtland was a Clergyman.

“What,”

“What,” said he to himself, “am I again to be the dupe of enthusiasm and morality?”—But Rosara, this bewitching girl, that had made such strange and sudden havock in his heart, she was not to be given up, and this Clergyman was her father.

Our hero had, by some address, gained the knowledge of Mr. Courtland's name, but it was plain to observe that he and his daughter were neither of them inhabitants of London; and how to become acquainted with their place of abode in the country without appearing inquisitive, was a matter of some perplexity to him. Whilst ruminating on some expedient, Rosara accidentally mentioned Hertfordshire, and soon after Cheshunt. With these hints he was obliged to be content,

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in the hope that, at parting, or in the course of the evening, Mr. Courtland would give him one of those general invitations to his house, which not uncommonly follows a slight favour conferred. In this hope, however, he was disappointed; the fatal moment came, the curtain dropped, and Rosara was to quit him, perhaps, for ever! He followed her through the lobby whilst clinging timorously to her father's arm; he saw her quit it to ascend the step of a hackney-coach, and she was instantly hurried from his sight. He had engaged himself to join a party at Ranelagh; but it was to no purpose;—he endeavoured to rally his spirits, the image of Rosara haunted his imagination, and he returned to St. James's-Square with his head full of plans to conquer and possess her.

CHAP.



CHAP. VIII.

THE next morning our hero arose earlier than usual, and with a disorder in his looks that visibly proved he had had little rest. Lovel, though accustomed to see him indisposed, and knew that his usual ailments proceeded from intemperance, or bad fortune at play, was at a loss to account for the present malady. Instead of a feverish flush upon his master's face, or with the contracted brows of chagrin and mortification, he beheld him thoughtful and dejected.

VOL. I.

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When

When his chocolate was handed to him, he refused to drink it, ordered himself to be denied to every body, and shewed so many symptoms of a serious depression of spirits, that the good valet was alarmed, and ventured to ask his master if any thing particular had happened to discompose him. Sir George, without answering his question, demanded if he knew, or had ever heard of a clergyman of the name of Courtland residing in any part of Hertfordshire. To this question Lovel replied in the negative.

“But, Sir,” said he, “I dare say I can easily learn where he lives, if there be such a person.”

“And that, Lovel,” replied the Baronet, “must be your immediate care. Last night I accidentally became acquainted

acquainted with him at the play; and it is necessary, for my future peace, that I should know where he is again to be met with."

Lovel completely misinterpreted his master's true motives for wishing to renew this acquaintance; and attributing them to some serious reflections that had, from Mr. Courtland's conversation, occupied his mind, could not contain his transports.

"If the county contains this good man," exclaimed he, "'tis hard but I'll find him out. Sir, permit your faithful servant to congratulate you on the impression his excellent discourse has already made upon your heart. Ten

H 2

thousand

thousand such friends as Mr. Selgrave will never do you half so much good."

"Is the blockhead distracted?" interrupted Sir George; "what whims and fancies have you taken into your head? 'Tis my heart that's on the rack; it is torn to pieces by the pangs of love!"

"Love, Sir!" replied Lovel, between hope and fear.

"Yes, I love this Clergyman's daughter—love her with the sincerest passion!"

"And will marry her, Sir?" demanded Lovel.

"What business have you to ask such an impertinent question, Sir?" retorted the Baronet, with some acrimony; "'tis sufficient that you should know I love, that I shall linger in a state of miserable suspense until I find again the beloved object; and are not these considerations,

my

my good fellow, sufficient to animate your zeal in my cause?"

"Well, Sir," replied Lovel, "I will do what I can."

"Go, then, directly, and take the road to Cheshunt."

Lovel bowed, and withdrew.

Being left alone, our hero began to consider what course he should pursue, in order to secure a second introduction to this family, and in what manner he should afterwards proceed in the attainment of Miss Courtland's affections, and in vanquishing those scruples of conscience, which he was afraid, being the daughter of a Clergyman, had been the more firmly planted in her mind. Notwithstanding the pernicious principles he

had imbibed respecting the deliberate seduction of women, he could not help shuddering at the idea of tearing an innocent and beautiful girl from a fond father's arms—perhaps the only solace of his age; and though he himself had been taught to despise what he supposed an unjust tax upon the laws of Nature, yet he concluded it would be impossible to convert a man of Mr. Courtland's age and profession to the same way of thinking, and that he would, of course, be made to suffer all the miseries of a man for ever disgraced by the desertion of his daughter from the paths of purity and rectitude. Again, when he considered the alternative, that he must marry, and lay himself open to the derision of his friends—that he must be satisfied with the love of one woman—that he must
yield

yield to all her caprices, and wink at all her extravagances, for fear of being thought a tyrant by the world, and subjecting himself to her retaliation, the prospect became still more offensive; yet he loved to distraction, and that love he was resolved to gratify.

Whilst debating the subject with himself, Selgrave entered the room. This gentleman had long been considered as one of the family, and was, of course, admitted to the Baronet's chamber. He was surprised to see his friend in his dressing-gown, looking unwell and peevish. He knew this disorder could not proceed from any frolic of dissipation, or he would have been of the party. That at Ranelagh had been prepared by him, at which he intended to have introduced the

Baronet to a *new face*, and had actually stipulated with the wretched woman, that if he succeeded in gaining her so opulent and fashionable a keeper, he should go shares in her allowances. To aggravate the treachery of this proceeding, the girl had long been subservient to his own pleasures; and though very pretty, had been abandoned by him, as having sufficiently satiated his vicious appetite. As she was not yet cast upon the town, and being strikingly handsome both in face and figure, he knew this imposition must escape detection.

“Why, Sir George,” said he, as he entered the room, “are not you a pretty fellow to break promises with your best friend? Where the devil were you last night? and what the plague ails you
this

this morning? Has Dr. Fordyce been croaking at you again, or how?"

"Charles," replied the Baronet, "I am caught at last. The heart of your friend is irrecoverably gone; and what is worse than all, I fear the object of his affections would stand the brunt even of thy assailments. Be that as it may, I am resolved to try for her, nor do I despair of success, if assisted by you and opportunity."

Here was a death-blow at once to the other's project. He was too much a man of the world, and too deeply read in the book of nature, to suppose, for a moment, Sir George would listen to any other proposals till the present object of his passion was dismissed; he nevertheless determined to bear his misfortune patiently,

and, by using his endeavours to hasten the accomplishment or destruction of our hero's present designs, he knew he would be the sooner able to introduce his own.

“ I am very sorry for this,” replied he, affecting concern, “ because I foresee the difficulties you will have to combat. Who is this lovely nymph, pray, and where does she live?”

Here the Baronet entered into a full recital of the playhouse adventure, not omitting a single particular; and concluded with saying, he had sent Lovel to Cheshunt to make enquiries.

Selgrave, notwithstanding his previous determination to desist from all arguments
on

on the subject, could not avoid being Rosara's friend on this occasion, though with no desire on earth to befriend her.

“ Sir George,” said he, “ I have listened to you with wonder and concern, and I must say that Don Quixote himself never projected a wilder scheme, or fell in love with more violent absurdity. What, can you imagine that a young woman, tutored as Miss Courtland must have been, and protected by the presence of a rigid Clergyman, that such a woman could even listen one moment to an address like your's? Would she not start at the remotest hint of your design—would she not in an instant appeal to her father—and would you not as instantaneously be dismissed? Admitting that you even conquered her scruples, and carried her off, what security have you against the

attacks of her kindred and friends? Would you not be hourly exposed to danger? But from what I can collect of your story, there does not appear to be the most distant chance of your ever gaining her consent to an elopement; and the attempt must be attended with its equal proportion of difficulty and peril, whether you gain that consent or not. No, Sir George, the seduction of a woman, such as you have described Miss Courtland to be, I deem impossible—I do, who am well versed in stratagems of the kind. If your frantic love has, however, gained such an ascendancy over your reason, why, there is but one way of gratifying it."

"How?" exclaimed the Baronet.

"Marry her," replied Selgrave, with a sarcastic grin.

"Never,"

“Never,” returned Sir George; “but I will nevertheless possess her. If you will assist my scheme, I am your’s; if not, I will myself pursue it.”

“Well,” replied the other, “if this be the case, I am contented to afford my aid.”

Sir George insisted upon Selgrave’s staying to dinner, and it was late in the evening before Lovel returned. The Baronet had conjectured rightly. Mr. Courtland’s house stood to the west of the village he had named, about three miles. Lovel described it as a beautiful little romantic cottage, and so surrounded by trees, as to be scarcely discernible.

“I found no difficulty, Sir,” observed he, “in gaining intelligence of Mr.

Courtland ; there was not a lad in the village but would have shewn me to his house ; not because he resided so near the town, but because his benevolence had extended far beyond it."

" Well, Lovel," replied the Baronet, " you have executed your commission to a nicety, and your zeal shall not pass unrewarded."

To this encouragement Lovel only answered with a sigh, and withdrew.

" How long have you had that servant?" demanded Selgrave, as the door closed.

" He was my father's favourite," replied Sir George, " and once particularly recommended by him to my notice."

" He

"He seems to me to take very uncommon interest in every thing that concerns you; I would not advise you to place too great a confidence in him."

"Truly, Selgrave," replied Sir George, "I should as soon suspect you as him of any treachery towards me. The poor fellow, I am convinced, would do any thing to serve me."

Selgrave felt a little confounded by this speech; conscious of his own base proceedings, he began to fear Sir George was not without his suspicions of them, and that his last observation was meant to hint as much. Our hero had no such ideas.



CHAP. IX.

THE next morning the Baronet was visited by his steward, who came to inform him that some of his tenants on his estate in Devonshire, and also at Bexfield, had been deficient in payment of their rents; and that unless they were lowered, many would be obliged to quit, and some had already given warning. In the present state of Sir George's mind, this was not the most soothing intelligence he could have received; he had already
spent

spent more than his income, and was in immediate want of a sum of money, not only to pay debts of honour, but other debts, which had been now a long time due, and for the discharge of which his creditors began to be clamorous. After a consultation with his steward, it was agreed that the rents on the estates should be lowered on the payment of the deficiencies of the last year, and that the estate at Bexfield should be immediately mortgaged; with the loan upon which, he designed, he said, to satisfy all his creditors, and to begin a plan of economy at home, that should, in the course of a year or two, set all to rights again. Poor Sir George! he was not aware how deep a root the love of pleasure had taken in his heart, and that a life of extravagance was now become necessary to his happiness.

happiness. A thousand pounds, which he had idly lost at hazard the preceding evening, in company with Selgrave's crew, gave him very serious alarm. He was not so infatuated with play, as not to foresee that a succession of such losses must very soon terminate in his ruin; he had, moreover, remarked, that although he sometimes won, yet his winnings were never adequate to his losses, and that he had been gradually losing immense sums at the very time when he supposed himself in a run of good luck. This consideration determined him to give up the gaming-table altogether. He had not yet suspected Selgrave of any villany towards him, but he began to have doubts of many of that gentleman's friends.

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In a few days his steward again visited him with better news. He said he had settled with the discontented farmers, and had, though with some difficulty, procured him the loan of ten thousand pounds on the whole of the Bexfield estate; and that he had appointed an early day with the lender to have the necessary deeds executed. These matters being adjusted to his satisfaction, Sir George began to revive, and the full tide of dissipation to flow as fast as ever. His passion for the fair daughter of Mr. Courtland had not suffered the smallest abatement since he first saw her; and unable any longer to restrain it, he summoned his friend Selgrave to assist him in contriving some method of gaining a second introduction to her.

“I have

"I have been turning this business in my mind, Sir George," said he, "and think, as we have begun somewhat *a la romance*, so we should continue. Your first introduction, you say, was at the Theatre; and I mean to borrow an incident from a good play to contrive your second."

"How! what do you mean?"

"Simply, that you and I, and a confidential servant, shall set out to-morrow afternoon, time enough to get to Cheshunt by dusk; and when we arrive at a convenient distance from the good Parson's house, your horse and you shall be upon bad terms, and you must be content to be thought for once a bad rider, by dexterously tumbling off, and, as the Epic poets have it, "biting the dust." The servant, of course, runs to the first house in view, which happens fortunately,

Fortunately to be Mr. Courtland's, for assistance; he, like the good Lady Bountiful, hastens to afford it, and we remain the successful Archer and Aimwell of the Stratagem."

"The contrivance is excellent," replied Sir George; "but suppose the family should be out?"

"Why then you will, of course, remain disabled till they return; a mutual recognition will soon take place, and the singularity of this second introduction cannot fail of procuring you a general invitation to the house."

"Dear Charles!" exclaimed the enraptured Baronet, "I shall bless Farquhar and thee as long as I live. Then, dear Miss Courtland, let me but gain thy heart, and——"

"First,"

“First,” interrupted Selgrave, “gain her good opinion of your understanding and temper; be not over hasty in declaring your passion, till you find she is satisfied you have been some time struggling with it. This will convince her it is not the mere effect of gallantry, but the genuine dictates of your heart, and a declaration sanctioned by your reason. When you think she is convinced you really love her, you may easily sap the foundation of her foolish prejudices, by making some judicious sacrifices to her vanity. Few women of her age can withstand the temptation to sin, if you can once bring them to believe they abandon, by marriage, all the opportunities Nature has given them of doing justice to their own charms and accomplishments, and that they devote to the caprice and ill-humour
of

of a tyrant husband, what might otherwise prove the magnet of general attraction, and the source of perpetual liberty and enjoyment;—nay, you may make these very persuasions flow from the purity of your love, and from the consideration of her happiness, in preference to your own;—that you scorn to take advantage of the trammels of wedlock, which, though they fettered her inclinations, were, according to the unjust distinctions of society, no bar to your's; that you were ready to convince her of the sincerity of your attachment, by making her the mistress of an immediate settlement; and that, whilst life lasted, you would vow to love her—to be dependant upon her own pleasures, and submissive to her own will. Pursue these directions with adroitness, and time your intercessions

intercessions well; and I think, Sir George, that, with your person, address, and consequence, you may succeed. However, if it must come to the *rape of Proserpine* at last, you may summon me and Melbank at a moment's warning; we will be punctual to the call, and be prepared for a rescue."

The Baronet was not conscious of the magnitude of the offences he was thus insidiously persuaded to plunge into; he was about, by a cruel and disgraceful artifice, to awaken the emotions of concern and apprehension in bosoms which had probably never felt them before; on his own account, too, and to forward his own ends, he was about to sully his everlasting reputation, and the reputation of his ancestors, by spreading a contagion

contagion of shame and grief round the tranquil and healthful walks of innocence, and gratifying a transitory passion at the expence of, perhaps, his eternal salvation. Anxious as he was to gain the object of his desires, he felt some repugnance to the plan he was prevailed upon to pursue:—the project was, however, ultimately determined upon, and Lovel ordered to prepare horses for their departure at the time proposed.

Sir George's mind had now become habituated to scenes of vice and folly; yet he would often think of Fordyce, and draw comparative views of the tranquillity he should have passed with him, and his present career of fluctuating pleasures. He had not been able, after the most diligent enquiry, to hear any thing of him; and therefore concluded that, owing to

the failure of his measures against him, he had quitted the connection altogether, and had left the *forbidden apartments*, so long the subject of uneasy suspense, to be explored at leisure. Even Selgrave was brought to own there could be no danger in diving into the mystery, since the man, to whose protection they had been so solemnly entrusted, had thought proper to abandon his post.

On the following day, the party from St. James's Square set out upon their intended project. It had been spent with cheerfulness and delight by Rosara and her father; they saw not the gathering tempest over their heads, they felt not the influence of approaching danger. The evening was setting in, and Mr. Courtland had taken up a favourite author. His lovely daughter had requested him to
read

read aloud whilst she worked—an employment she knew he liked, when a loud ringing at the gate startled them.

“Bless me!” exclaimed Rosara, “who can this be? Did you expect any visitors, papa?”

“No, child,” replied Mr. Courtland; “and if I had, none of my friends are accustomed to make such a tumult at my door.”

‘He was here interrupted by the servant, who had scarcely time to announce Mr. Selgrave, when that gentleman made his appearance. It was a face they had never seen, and both father and daughter were confounded at his abrupt approach.

“Before I apologize for my intrusion,” said he, affecting great agitation,

tion, "allow me to solicit your assistance in behalf of a gentleman, who has received a severe fall from his horse, and is at present unable to speak or move."

The votaries of Charity are ignorant of ceremonies or distinctions, when summoned to execute her divine purposes. No questions were therefore asked. Mr. Courtland was the first to administer every active aid; his servants, accustomed to study his very wishes, were equally assiduous; and Sir George was soon brought in, and placed in Mr. Courtland's own chair. The old gentleman immediately recognized his playhouse acquaintance, and started back with evident marks of astonishment; a deep sigh escaped him, and his countenance betrayed emotions he seemed anxious to conceal. The first object the Baronet beheld,

beheld, was Rosara regarding him with looks beaming sympathy and benevolence. Unschooled in the prudery of her sex, she felt no false delicacy in executing the duties of humanity; a fellow-creature required her assistance, and she would have given it to the meanest beggar.

"I certainly have seen this gentleman before," exclaimed the good Clergyman.

"He is the same, I'm sure, papa," replied his lovely daughter, "that so kindly befriended me at the play."

Rosara's recognition was more than the Baronet could support; and had not Selgrave interfered, he would possibly, in the first transports of his joy, have betrayed every thing. A timely caution, however, kept him in his seat.

"I have, Sir," observed he, coming forward, "heard my friend *Sir George Meriton* mention the circumstance."

"Indeed I am heartily glad I have been so fortunate as to afford Sir George this assistance," observed Mr. Courtland.

The Baronet prevented further reply, by opening his eyes, and feigning to recover gradually from the stupor into which his fall had thrown him.

"Good God!" exclaimed he, staring about, "where am I?"

"In the house of Mr. Courtland," replied Selgrave, "and it is to him you owe, perhaps, the preservation of your life."

"Is it possible?" rejoined our hero. "How can I repay this kindness?"

"I beg,

"I beg, Sir George," replied Mr. Courtland mildly, "you will not lay such stress upon a common act of humanity; you make me blush to think that the depravity of mankind has made such duties a subject for ebullitions of gratitude. Surely, the person who assists, is the creature that should be grateful—grateful to that Power who, out of the multitude which hourly neglect and despise his commands, has given him grace to reverence and obey them."

The friends looked at each other with some confusion. Having taken some refreshment, and being pretty well recovered from his fall, the Baronet, as in politeness bound, proposed to Selgrave renewing their journey to town. To this motion, however, the hospitable Clergyman strenuously objected.

“The evening is set in, Sir George,” observed he, “and if you are not particularly obliged to leave us, I have beds both for yourself and your friend. I tell you beforehand, they are not such as you may have been accustomed to repose in; but you will find the down of welcome on your pillow, and that, I hope, will make you lie easily, and sleep cheerfully. In the meantime, Rosara, my love, go you and consult the cook, and see what you can prevail upon her to give us for our suppers.”

The Baronet received this invitation with so much satisfaction, that an indifferent spectator would have expressed some surprise at a recovery so rapid. The necessary directions having been given to Lovel respecting the horses, the party began a conversation on various subjects ;
in

in the course of which, our hero gave very sufficient proofs of the goodness of his understanding, and the sprightliness of his invention. Selgrave left him the field entirely, and seldom uttered a word. Rosara took notice of his silence, and kindly enquired if he was unwell.

“Not in the least, Madam,” replied he; “but when the Baronet is in spirits, and will converse, I am always afraid of his enticing me into an argument; and as I wish to keep well in your’s and your worthy father’s opinion, I deem it impolitic to give him an opportunity of exposing my weak side.”

“Do you think us then such very close discriminators?” replied she, with vivacity, “or do you imagine that the meed of merit can only be adjudged to the most eloquent disputant?”

“Not so,” rejoined Selgrave; “but where eloquence is the language of the heart,”—(and he looked archly at the Baronet)—“and not merely used as the ornament of speech, it is apt to convince sooner than the demonstrations of the soundest logician.”

“Aye, aye, I see what you are aiming at, Sir,” interrupted Courtland; “you want to draw my daughter into a snare, in order to compliment her; but she must not be so corrupted. You Londoners think our country lasses take mortal offence if you do not flatter them into a belief that they are something more than human; and it may be so with the generality perhaps: but I have taken great pains to make mine know, she is only flesh and blood, with very ordinary qualifications, and not a bit better than her neighbours.”

“You

"You did right, Sir," replied Sir George; "for if there be any would-be divinities in your neighbourhood, they will be convinced at once, by looking at Miss Courtland, how ineffectual their endeavours must prove to gain votaries at their shrine; and you very laudably bring her forward as a check to that absurd vanity which might otherwise mislead them."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Mr. Courtland, between jest and earnest, "no more of this!"

Supper was now announced. Selgrave took his place by Mr. Courtland, and artfully began a conversation with him, well suited to draw his attention from every other subject. Sir George, profiting by this, made the best advantage of his time with Rosara;—the topic of love, agreeably to Selgrave's advice, was not

touched upon, but every word and action that might indirectly betray the passion he felt, was made use of. The insidious sigh, the penetrating glance, could not be misunderstood; and the tender Rosara felt the first approaches of sympathy, without knowing the danger of encouraging them. Poetry had been the subject of Sir George's panegyric; Rosara loved it with equal ardour. In the charms of music and painting they equally participated; every thing that she admired, every opinion that she formed, strange to tell, exactly corresponded with the young Baronet's! How odd did it appear to her that, with such different educations, and in such different walks of life, their minds should be so congenial! With such suggestions disturbing her fancy, she retired to her chamber, after taking a hasty leave of her new friends. The

Baronet

Baronet watched her as she left the room, and caught her last look. The use he made of this momentary glance was effectual; and Rosara, for the first time in her life, passed a sleepless night.



CHAP. X.

THE next morning at breakfast, though Rosara appeared with rather less bloom upon her countenance than usual, it rather heightened than diminished her beauty. The Baronet betrayed evident symptoms of disquietude; though with more civility than truth, he professed he had never slept better in his life.

"I perceive, Sir George," said Mr. Courtland, "that you have not yet got the better of your fall. I hope the *next time* we have the pleasure of seeing you at the Vicarage, you will not be so unpleasantly announced to us."

Sir George, who had been anxiously expecting this invitation, and which he had begun to fear his host did not mean to give, arose at once from his desponding attitude. The colour, which had forsaken his cheeks, returned almost instantaneously, and the speech made altogether so remarkable a change in his deportment, that Rosara saw, and caught the emotion. In her father's tea-cup she put no sugar, in Selgrave's no cream, and the Baronet had received such a plentiful supply of both, that it was not without
some

some difficulty he could contrive to drink the contents.

“ I am obliged to you, my dear Sir,” replied Sir George, “ for thus allowing me to profit by my good fortune. A friend like Mr. Courtland——”

“ May be easily acquired,” interrupted the old gentleman, “ any hour in the day, and without risking your neck for him either, Sir George. You must not think to make me believe my friendship is so valuable to you as you would infer it is; an accident brought us together, and *accident* may as easily part us. At the same time I do not wish or expect such a parting to take place; *do as you would be done by*, Sir, and we shall always continue friends.”

Lovel

Lovel very soon after appeared with the horses, and the Baronet had no excuse left for tarrying any longer. On parting, Sir George warmly pressed Mr. Courtland's hand, and the good Clergyman as warmly returned the pressure.

"I need not say," exclaimed he, after abruptly bidding Miss Courtland adieu, "how happy you will make me, Sir, by honouring this address," (putting a card into Mr. Courtland's hand). "As to Miss Courtland, she must not venture to accompany you; for great as I value, and much as I admire her, I should never forgive myself for having permitted the tongue of scandal to violate, by the most distant insinuations, her spotless reputation."

Selgrave,

Selgrave, who had put his foot in the stirrup, made a full pause. Inconceivable was his astonishment upon hearing such a speech from Sir George. What! a man, whose interest it was to ridicule this ideal reputation, to make Miss Courtland believe her chief happiness depended upon her laughing at, and despising it as an absurdity—to own, at such a time, too, the necessity of keeping it sacred, even at the expence of his own satisfaction; it was with some difficulty he could avoid speaking.—Mr. Courtland expressed also a little surprise, but from a different motive. There was a delicacy and propriety in the Baronet's self-denial, that seemed to correspond very little with the principles of a libertine. He saw no reason that Sir George could have in being the first to recommend Miss Courtland's remaining in the country, should
he

he himself be ever induced to pay him a visit in town, but such as bespoke him a man of honour and consideration. Rosara, too, seemed delighted with this proof of regard, and gave him a smile, which seemed to testify she felt more than it would become her to express. Mr. Courtland accepted the card, and assured Sir George he would call upon him with pleasure whenever business brought him to town.

The parties then mounted their horses, and were presently out of sight. They had proceeded two miles before either gentleman opened his mouth. Selgrave was the first to break silence, which he did by a loud and forced laugh. Sir George was not only surprised, but piqued at this introduction.

“Your

"Your laughs, Selgrave," said he, "are generally well-timed, but at present I could dispense with them."

The mirth, which had been before feigned, was now realized.

"'Pon my soul, Meriton," replied he, "I cannot help it; such is the waywardness of man's nature, that he is frequently impelled to laugh when he should be, and really is, vexed. What, in the name of malice and misfortune, could induce you, after you had laid so good a foundation for the accomplishment of your wishes, not only to undo what you had before so completely effected, but to throw an insurmountable obstacle in your own way towards any renewal of the scheme? You have owned that reputation is a sacred treasure, not even to be exposed
to

to violation; you have, of your own accord, put a positive *veto* to your mistress's coming with her father to see you in town, because you are apprehensive the gossip-mongers should say she was pretty and accomplished: the downright conduct of a jealous, suspicious, *honourable* lover! Why, you should have pressed her coming to town; you should have made her wish to come, by a description of its amusements, pleasures, and agreeable connections; you should have mentioned how happy your aunt, or your cousin would be to receive and entertain her, if she would permit them the honour of cultivating her friendship; and if you had talked of reputation at all, it should have been the reputation of a drawing-room, of being the first at an agreeable sally, a ready inuendo, or in discussing the news of the day; the adoration
paid

paid at the shrine of vivacity, unfettered by restraint and solemn affectation; and the general applause beauty like her's must receive, if permitted to join the circle of the Muses and Graces;—but a 'spotless reputation!' Heaven defend me! you might as well have talked to her about a Bible and a prayer-book, or a contract and a wedding-ring at once!"

"Damnation!" interrupted the Baronet, in a fury of vexation, "suppose I do get a contract and a wedding-ring, what's that to you, Sir? Rosara Courtland deserves them; she is beyond the reach of seduction, *fair* as I allow it; and I must marry her in my own defence."

"To be sure!" sneered Selgrave; "and then, in about a year's time, we shall have my Lord, and the Duke of, and Sir Harry, sharing her favours (all in *fair play*,

play, you know, Sir George); and you will probably be run through the body, that she may take a fuller swing with your title and estate."

"Mr. Selgrave," replied the Baronet, solemnly, "if I, with my general opinion of the sex, marry Miss Courtland, it will be upon a full conviction that—"

"Excuse me, Sir George Meriton," interrupted Selgrave, "if I correct you there. It is not in the nature of woman to possess the sincerity of man; take what the world will call the most virtuous of her sex, sift her disposition, and you will find that matrimony will produce defects, which, in spite of all your sagacity and penetration, you were not able previously to discover. How, therefore, are you to be fully convinced? Women receive a new store, a fresh catalogue of failings and propensities when united to their
their

their husbands. The most virtuously inclined are unconscious of the change wedlock makes in their dispositions; and she that, when a maid, was mild, modest, and condescending—when a wife, will be proud, passionate, and presuming. Thus, my friend, marriage is at best but a lottery; nor is it possible for you to find out, with all the skill of the most consummate politician, whether your ticket will come up a blank, a prize not worth having, or one of those capitals you have mentioned. For my part, I wish to see you happy; and if you chuse to run the risk, I hope you will succeed; but I would advise you on no account to follow up such a scheme with your present mistress, and I will tell you my reasons. Miss Courtland, though very lovely and innocent, and all that, is too ignorant, too unsuspicious of the tricks of the fashionable

fashionable world to be the wife of Sir George Meriton. A sprig of unpolished, childish simplicity, suddenly transplanted from her little vale in the country, to the resplendent garden of pleasure and dissipation, must either die on such a soil, or suffer itself to be cherished by the genial dews. She would soon, in that case, be vulnerable to flattery, and learn the tricks of insinuation herself; she would be gay with the gay, and think no harm in it; she would learn to coquet, and talk scandal, and think no harm in it; because she would be entirely ignorant of any harm such conduct had ever done. What is the alternative then? Why, you must throw up the game of fashion and consequence, and be content to live with her, 'for herself alone,' in the flowery cottage of obscurity. Oh, what a subject
for

for the pastoral poet and the novelist! nay, perhaps, the satirist might have a smack at you:

He that could once to fashion's *annual* power
Prescribe the bounds, and rule the varying hour;
Whose wishes Pleasure linger'd to obey,
Whether soft Love or Bacchus led the way,
Is gone, alas! to tend his Phœbe's flock,
And add another *gander* to her flock."

Selgrave had found, by experience, that his friend was sooner moved by the fear of ridicule than any thing else; and it had, in the present instance, effectually worked upon his mind. The arguments, too, which related to the danger of marrying, of all other women, one so inexperienced, had had their due weight.

"Well," replied he, "admitting all that you have advanced, and that I am necessitated either to give up my prize, or

to pursue her on my own terms, how am I to overcome the difficulty you say I created at parting?"

Selgrave now thought he had a fair opportunity of endeavouring once more to detach his mind from the pursuit, and introduce his own subject.

"I have already fully considered the matter," replied he, "and will tell you fairly—I think it insurmountable."

He then, with great dexterity, introduced his opinion, which he had not yet given, of Miss Courtland's understanding. This, he said, had been too good by nature not to know there could be no qualifying a sentiment so positively characteristic of a matrimonial intention by any evasion whatever. How was he to
make

make her believe, that although her *spotless reputation* was sacred, yet her *honour* was a notion absurd and chimerical?—a girl endowed with all the advantages of the best books, and the best conversation. He then imparted his suspicions of the father's penetration; and that, from the ambiguous speech he made just before they parted, every drawback was to be dreaded from his foresight and discrimination.

“ From all these circumstances, Sir George,” continued he, “ I do seriously think, a further prosecution of this affair will prove fruitless; or, should it succeed, that it will involve you in a very troublesome and dangerous predicament, not only from the father's, but the son's resentment; for he has a son, I am told, a youth of great expectation in the law,

and endowed, most likely, with very high notions of honour and propriety. Now, Sir George, if you will be wise, and take the advice of your friend, whose admonitions you have very seldom, I am proud to make the remark, rejected, you will renounce this Miss Courtland, nor suffer your heart to be entangled in the snares of an ideal love. If you will do this, I will engage to introduce to you a phoenix, that shall spring from her ashes, with all her charms, and none of these *honourable* weights and clogs to interrupt your enjoyments—a girl formed for pleasure, with a good understanding, and an affectionate heart: in short, Meriton, she is a *pupil* of mine; and although I meant to take her to my own bosom, I am willing to relinquish her to my friend, because I see him on the verge of folly, and ready to tumble from the precipice.”

Here

Here were baits difficult to be resisted ; but the image of Rosara had made too deep an impression on the Baronet's mind ; and the only reply to his friend's offer was a shake of the head, which operated as a check to all further remark. Selgrave now perceived that, in the fate of Miss Courtland, his own future interest was very materially involved, and began to turn his thoughts towards its speedy accomplishment. Occupied with these reflections, little more passed between the travellers during the rest of their ride.



CHAP. XI.

THE following week was spent by Sir George Meriton in a state of great suspense; he panted to renew his visits in Hertfordshire, but Mr. Courtland had not yet given him any further encouragement. The faithful Lovel observed the melancholy that was gradually stealing upon his master's mind; he also suspected the cause; but much as he loved him, he scorned to offer either his advice or assistance in the prosecution of any further disgraceful projects. Sometimes he ventured to give his opinion of the beauty
and

and merit of Miss Courtland, concluding his observation with, "What an excellent wife she would make!"—But the Baronet's severe rebukes, repeated in passion and anger, had determined him never to mention the subject again. One morning, as he was pacing the breakfast-parlour, and cursing the caprice of Fortune, that had dispensed wealth, distinction, and health to him, but had denied him happiness, the door suddenly opened, and Mr. Courtland was announced. Unspeakable was the joy manifested on this occasion; he ran to the worthy Clergyman—he pressed his hand with every demonstration of the liveliest joy.

"This welcome, Sir George," said he, after having taken his seat, "is very grateful to me; but I confess I am a little surprised

surprised that you should so suddenly have taken a fancy to an old man, whose situation and pursuits in life differ so materially from your own. However, as you seem desirous of cultivating my acquaintance, I shall never deny you the opportunity; and therefore hope your visits at the vicarage will be repeated whenever you can tear yourself away from the pleasures and splendour of London."

Although the Baronet was overjoyed at receiving this general invitation, yet, as he was inclined to believe, not only from his own remarks, but from Selgrave's, that Mr. Courtland had observed his passion for Rosara, his suspicions led him to attribute this conduct to selfish motives, and that both father and daughter had laid a plan to entrap him into matrimony. This illiberal supposition confirmed

confirmed him in a resolution he had before almost determined to abandon ; and he resolved, at all hazards, to attempt the seduction of the object of his affections, merely considering it as a justifiable retaliation.

“ Believe me, my dear Sir,” replied he, after a pause, “ that, were it not for the fear of intruding, I should be oftener with you than amidst the most captivating scenes of splendid profusion this city is capable of affording.”

“ I think so too,” rejoined Courtland, gravely ; “ but take care, Sir George, that, when you do repeat your visit, you come the *right road*. Your friend, Mr. Selgrave, has the art of attracting the attention, and may, I fear, be the cause of *misleading* you ; *his* visits I can dispense

with. Good day ! and believe me I wish to be your friend."

Before Sir George could make any reply, Mr. Courtland was gone, and left him not more astonished at his last speech, which seemed to insinuate a full persuasion of the trick that had lately been imposed upon him, than indignant at advances, which, he was now fully convinced, proceeded from interested motives.



CHAP. XII.

SIX weeks had now passed away since Mr. Courtland's visit to Sir George. This period of time had been employed by the Baronet in every art that could stimulate, and ultimately fix the affections of Rosara. Of the worthy man's invitation he had taken ample advantage, nor were his base designs even suspected by him. The autumn was now far advanced, and it was at the decline of a beautiful evening, when returning from a healthful and refreshing walk, Sir George ventured to disclose his passion to his

K 6

mistress,

mistress, and, in return, gained the fatal secret of her unconscious heart. The delighted Baronet took advantage of the confession warm from her trembling lips, and pressed her to his bosom. Her fate was thus decided; she had given way to the sudden impulse of passion, and yielded her affections to she knew not whom. Sir George Meriton had said he loved her; but might not this be a criminal love? He was amiable, persuasive; but might he not be deceitful? A consciousness of these truths made her shudder at her hasty confession, but it was too late to recal it; all she could now do was to repulse his further addresses whilst hid in ambiguity, and endeavour to banish him for ever from her heart.

On

On the morning which followed this event, the Baronet returned to town, and Mr. Courtland observed, for the first time, that his daughter had absented herself at his departure. When she did appear, it was with a pale and dejected countenance, and with eyes swoln with weeping; in vain had she endeavoured to rally her spirits, and had prepared herself to stand the shock of her father's scrutiny, and consequent reproof. Her fears were soon dissipated; the feeling Courtland knew too well the cause of her emotions; but they were emotions not to be aggravated by a cruel catechism. Tenderly placing her in a chair, he thus began—

“My dearest Rosara, think not I am ignorant of what has passed in your heart since your first introduction to Sir
George

George Meriton; but I do not altogether blame your choice; he is sensible, generous, and, I hope—but more of that hereafter. Dry, therefore, your tears, and listen to my advice.”

Encouraged by this kind preface, she endeavoured to hide her blushes in her parent’s bosom. The worthy man proceeded:—

“Where prudence has been wanting to check the early habits and irregularities of youth, the approaches of vice meet with little interruption, and men become bad before they have had time to employ a good and well-disposed understanding. It is this consideration that makes it so necessary to use, with a sparing hand, the advantages of birth and fortune, and to fortify the mind, by books
and

and conversation, against the attacks of flattery and false reasoning, the never-failing attendants upon prosperity. My observation has told me that Sir George Meriton is too much under the controul of his passions, that he is hasty and credulous, that he has neglected to think and act with caution, and that he is, of course, obnoxious to the encroachments of evil; he has embarked in the folly and dissipation of the world with little experience, and he has chosen his friends without any discrimination; he has been spending his money, and wasting his constitution, under the mistaken notion that he is rich, young, and gay, and consequently *ought* to do so. Had he been early instructed in the lessons of prudence, had the formation of the mind been the primary object of a too indulgent father, he would, by this time, have
been

been employing a noble fortune in benefiting his fellow-creatures, and in useful, rational, and social enjoyments. It is necessary, therefore, my dear child, that you should exert that reason and fortitude, which I have endeavoured to implant in your mind; and, by resisting the struggles of your inclination, prepare it for any disappointment you may hereafter meet with. Do not think your heart is irrecoverable, for I know it to be a virtuous one; I also hope it can never be long attached to vice, and that reason is a stronger guard upon your affections than either fancy or passion. Lastly, beware of disclosing your sentiments ere you are fully acquainted with the nature of his: remember, that it is not sufficient for him to say he loves, but that he loves with honour."

The

The blush that had been gradually deepening on Rosara's cheek, was now succeeded by a sudden paleness and trembling. Courtland arose from his seat, and walked in an agitated manner about the room; he had observed the emotion with surprise and alarm.

"What!" resumed he, stopping short, "you have then already revealed them? Unthinking girl!" continued he, in a tone of anger he had never before used, "you have undone yourself!"—Then, with a milder accent, for he saw she was scarcely able to support herself—"I am not angry with you, Rosara; the best heart may sometimes err. You have not acted with your usual prudence; we must therefore be more cautious in future."

"Oh my dearest, my indulgent father!" sobbed she, "why do you so suddenly

suddenly forgive your thoughtless child? why do you not, by your just reproofs, inflict upon her that punishment she deserves?"

"Perhaps," replied he, tenderly, "I may be obliged to inflict a punishment on you, Rosara; but it is necessary for your future peace, my child. Do you think you shall be able to bear it?"

"Oh, yes!" rejoined she, "and I will submit to it without a sigh."

"Take care," replied Mr. Courtland; "you do not yet know the nature of it. Sighs are very independent things, and will not sometimes be controuled. The Baronet's next visit must be to me, and me alone; the result of our conversation must give you to him, or tear you from him for ever. Prepare your heart, therefore, to sustain a shock which time and reason can alone repair."

We

We return now to our hero. Elated with schemes, which had hitherto met with every assistance from love and opportunity, he prepared for a final attack. Selgrave was soon made acquainted with Rosara's declaration, and advised that an immediate proposal should be made to her to elope with him to Bexfield, since it would be impossible to elude the vigilance of her careful parent; in the meantime, that that mansion should be put into preparation against the arrival of its new mistress. Although the Baronet was not quite so sanguine as his friend about the event of this proposal, yet the certainty of Miss Courtland's loving him appeared a strong argument in his favour. Lovel was directed to repair immediately to Bexfield, and get things ready for the accommodation of himself and some friends,

friends, who purposed staying with him there a few weeks.

“Perhaps,” said Sir George, “a lady or two may be in the case, Lovel; and therefore give directions to the house-keeper accordingly.”

“Ladies, Sir!” replied Lovel, “why surely you don’t intend——”

“When I give my commands, Sir,” interrupted the Baronet, “I expect they will be obeyed without a comment; either resolve to be less inquisitive in future, or quit my service directly.”

“I have done, Sir,” replied Lovel, sighing. “Heaven knows——”

“Begone!” replied the Baronet.

Lovel reluctantly withdrew to execute his painful commission—painful, because he too rightly conjectured it was to be
the

the prologue to a scene of wickedness. — The artless conduct of Rosara, and the confidence she had placed in her lover by so soon revealing her passion, failed to produce that effect upon his mind, which a few months ago it might have done. Habituated now to scenes of profligacy, his soul had forgot the taste of pleasure; and from having been liberal, unsuspicious, and good-natured, he had become misanthropical, close, and surly. The malignant passions had begun to mingle with those of sensuality, and he was glad to fly from the rising conflict of his own reflections to the first temple of dissipation; even his integrity had fallen from the slender prop that had supported it, and he began to contract debts he knew he should never be able to pay, and to spend the money he had appropriated for the discharge of those which had been already long

long due. Though conscious of the difficulties that were pursuing him, he was unqualified to guard against their approach by a train of rebellious passions he was unable to subdue. Thus conditioned, no wonder he had been so inhumanly anxious to take advantage of Miss Courtland's tenderness, and that he felt pleasure in anticipating the triumph he should gain over the brightest work of Nature, the purest example of happiness and virtue.

Rosara, in the meantime, was endeavouring, by every means in her power, to prepare herself for the shock her heart might probably experience;—she paid several visits among her neighbouring friends; she exerted herself in contributing to the amusement of the parties she went into. When the remembrance of

Meriton interfered with these her more trivial occupations, she would have recourse to those excellent authors, who, in the doctrines they inculcate, and the rewards they hold out, confirm our virtuous resolutions, and reconcile us to every worldly calamity.

Lovel had been absent now four days As it was not more than a day's journey to Bexfield, his master reprimanded him, on his return, for having staid so long on his errand ; his excuse was, that he had found the house in great disorder, owing to Sir George's having so long neglected it (for, except once or twice on a hunting excursion, he had not been to reside there since his father's death), and that he had been obliged to assist the housekeeper in her domestic preparations ; that it was now in tolerable condition, and, in the
course

course of a day or two, it would be fit to receive him.

The Baronet had, in consequence of Selgrave's advice, kept Lovel in ignorance of his designs against Miss Courtland, for reasons too obvious to mention, nor was it intended he should be of the party on the night they were to be carried into execution ;—on this account he had been before reprimanded for his inquisitiveness, and it was only by inference that this honest servant had satisfied himself of the true state of the case.



CHAP. XIII.

THE following day our hero dined with Selgrave, and the next was appointed for Sir George's visit to the vicarage—a visit that was to decide upon the nature of the future measures to be pursued. The Baronet had ventured to write to Miss Courtland two or three times since the mutual avowal that had taken place, but no answer had been returned; a circumstance which he interpreted into an ill omen. Selgrave, however, observed that opportunity might be wanting on her part; for it was fair to suppose old Court-

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land

land must be privy to almost every action of her life. With these assurances the Baronet departed the next morning, pondering all the way upon the probable success, but never once upon the actual atrocity, of his plans. Leaving his horse at the inn at Cheshunt, he walked on to Mr. Courtland's house. The good Clergyman was standing at the door with a book in his hand, and returned the Baronet's salute in a manner less warm than usual.

“Did you ride hither, Sir George?” asked Mr. Courtland.

“Yes; but I left my horse at the inn,” replied the other, carelessly, “for I am come to spend the day with you.”

“You know best,” rejoined Courtland, gravely, as he ushered him into the parlour, “whether I ought to be thankful for that honour.”

“You,

"You, my dear Sir!" replied the Baronet, surprised; "'tis I that must ever consider myself the distinguished person; where is my lovely young friend?"

"Pray, sit down," observed Courtland, solemnly, "and before I answer your question, candidly reply to one of mine. Do you love her?"

Our hero was thunderstruck at this abrupt demand. That Mr. Courtland had observed the slightest symptoms of love in his conduct, he had not a thought; he found it, therefore, impossible to conceal the embarrassment and confusion he was thrown into.

"You—you—surprise me, Sir," stammered he. "Love her! Certainly. No one that sees Miss Courtland but must esteem her."

“ You wish, I perceive,” continued Courtland, “ to evade my question ; what then am I to think of your intentions, Sir, when I know you have given her to understand as much, and have extorted from her a reciprocal avowal ? Is not this the fact ? ”

“ I do not deny it,” replied the Baronet.

“ Well, Sir George, I will not oppress you by many more demands or observations on the subject. Considering you as a man of principle and honour, I cannot suppose you have laid any deliberate snare to seduce my child, or that you would wantonly trifle with her affections at the risk of her and my happiness.”

“ Surely, my dear friend,” interrupted the Baronet, “ I have given you no reason to suspect I mean to injure my sweet Rosara. There may be, perhaps, some few objections to an *immediate* marriage, and,
in

in the interim, all that the sincerest love and gratitude can offer, is her's."

Mr. Courtland arose from his seat.—
"Sir," replied he, "till those objections be removed, your offers of love and gratitude she has been taught to despise, and so farewell! But remember this, you have drawn the tear of anguish from her eye, and it must, and shall be wiped away."

He then left the room; there was an indignant resolution in his manner that at once oppressed and alarmed the Baronet, and he withdrew from the late hospitable mansion, with a heart sunk with shame, love, and disappointment. As he approached the inn, he began to form new designs. The prevention he had received was as severe as unexpected; it was evident that Rosara had repented of the rash avowal she had made, and that, apprehen-

hensive of the dangers it might expose her to, had confessed her imprudence to her father. This circumstance, he was persuaded, would put Courtland upon his guard, and that, in consequence, the earliest opportunity should be seized of carrying Rosara off; then he thought of relinquishing his prize altogether, or else of returning, confessing his fault, and offering his hand;—but the first of these ideas love forbade him to adopt; and the last, pride and pique. At length he resolved to write a letter to Miss Courtland, which he designed should be delivered to her by one of her father's servants, then at the inn. This resolution was no sooner formed than executed, and the confidential servant dispatched, properly cautioned, with the epistle. All that love, flattery, and false reasoning could

could dictate, was displayed to persuade her to renounce virtue for him; and it concluded with earnestly entreating her, whatever might be her final determination, to give him at least an opportunity of seeing her once again. Whatever effect he expected his arguments would produce, he was not suffered to remain long in suspense. The servant soon returned with it unopened, and this verbal message—"Whatever Sir, George Meriton may have to write about, his letters must be directed to Mr. Courtland."

Enraged beyond bearing at this contemptuous treatment, which he was persuaded had originated in the father's interference, and stung with the complicated pangs of love and disappointment, he sat down, and wrote the following

letter to Selgrave, which he dispatched by his own servant on a post-horse.

“ *Dear Charles,*

“ I have formed my resolution. We must proceed *vi et armis*. You and Melbank, together with the trusty mastiffs, Bill and Timothy, must meet me to-morrow morning at Jack Darnley’s, to whom I shall repair to-night, to avoid suspicion. I shall propose a plan for your approbation. Lovel tells me every thing is ready at Bexfield ; so call in St. James’s Square, and tell him from me to lose no time in executing the commission I left for him : only a journey into Sussex for a few days.

“ Thine,

“ G. MERITON.”

Having

Having swallowed a hasty dinner, he left a note to be delivered to Mr. Courtland, in which he coldly bade him farewell, and thanked him for all favours. He concluded it by saying, that since his company had proved disagreeable, and had subjected him to slights from a quarter where he had least expected them, that he had thought it best to relinquish all future expectations, though he did it with the deepest regret.—The intention of this letter was to make Mr. Courtland believe he had really given up all thoughts of Rosara, and so throw him off his guard. This matter, therefore, being settled, he mounted his horse, and bent his course towards Craigley, the seat of his friend Darnley.

Mr. Darnley was a young man of dissolute principles, who had already squan]

dered away one fortune, and, by the sudden death of a distant relation, had been enabled to do the same by another. The present villa had been purchased for the ease and convenience of a kept mistress, to whose arms he occasionally flew from the riot and noise of the town. He was one of the Baronet's oldest associates, and had been, though not in an equal degree with his friend, one of Mr. Selgrave's pupils. It was nearly dark when Sir George made his appearance, and then with a countenance so much disturbed by the various reflections that had been intruding themselves upon his mind, that Darnley enquired if any thing was the matter.

“Yes,” replied Sir George; “something of consequence, in which I wish to employ you.”

“I am

"I am glad of it," rejoined Darnley, misunderstanding him; "you will not find a friend more zealous in your cause."

"Poh!" added the Baronet, "you don't comprehend me."

He then related to him all the particulars of his failure at the vicarage, and the contempt he had been treated with both by Rosara and her father; that he nevertheless loved the girl to distraction, and that he had determined to carry her off to Bexfield on the following evening.

"Selgrave, Melbank, & Co. will be here to-morrow morning," continued he; "and you, Darnley, must assist me with your horses, for mine, brought through the country, would excite suspicion. The postchaise that brings Selgrave, shall be detained."

“No, no,” replied Darnley, “you shall have my chariot with the covering on, and then we shall be secured from pursuit as well as suspicion.”

These matters being agreed upon, the Baronet dispatched a messenger to Bexfield, to see that every thing was in readiness for the reception of himself and friends. It had been originally our hero's intention to have solicited Darnley's female friend as a companion for Rosara; but he afterwards considered that a woman so ignorant, and even vulgar, as Darnley had confessed she was, would disgust rather than sooth and persuade her. Selgrave, on the receipt of the Baronet's letter, repaired to St. James's Square, where he found Lovel, to whom he communicated his master's orders.

“My

“My master then, Sir,” said he, “is going, I presume, to Bexfield?”

“Nay, how should I know?” replied Selgrave. “Whatever business he has commissioned you to do, should be done certainly whilst he remains at his villa, where your attendance may be more easily dispensed with.”

“I know he is going,” replied Lovel, “and you, I know, will accompany him, Sir; but take care, do not drive my unhappy master to despair. There is a just God, Mr. Selgrave, who will never suffer him to be punished, and you to escape!”—Thus saying, he hastily withdrew from the hall, leaving Selgrave not more astonished than alarmed.

He was now convinced, of what he had long suspected, that Lovel was his enemy, and, though a servant, might undo him.

He

He was satisfied, too, of his sagacity in having discovered what both the Baronet and himself had been so studious to conceal from him ; and fearful that he meant to proceed to Bexfield on some plan of counteraction, he gave a private order to his own servant to watch the valet's motions, and give timely notice if that should be his intention. Having issued this command, he repaired to Melbank's lodgings, where he acquainted him with the Baronet's determination, and consulted him upon some mode for the speedy and effectual removal of Lovel from his service.

"Pshaw!" said Melbank, "'tis not worth while ; it is almost up with Meriton now ; he can't *bleed* much longer."

"That's true, too," rejoined the other, "and so, Billy, let's have a bottle of thy
Falernium,

Falernium, and we'll drink to the driving in of our *lances*, my boy! What have you done with your pupil, Lord Delaval? Poor devil! he wasn't born to hold out long against thy cannonading."

"I took leave of him last week," replied Melbank, "after safely lodging him in the King's Bench. He requested me to accept of his *title* as a reward for my *services*."

"Ha! ha! ha!" vociferated the other; "I suppose that will be the case with my George, for he's devilish proud."

By the time they had finished their bottle, Selgrave's man returned with tidings that he had privately followed Lovel on the *right road*, near three miles; and that he had overheard him tell the porter, that he would remember to

deliver his letter to his aunt at Tunbridge.

This intelligence removed Selgrave's uneasiness, and another bottle was called for to the success of the Baronet's scheme.



CHAP. XIV.

SELGRAVE and Melbank, attended by their confederates on horseback, set off the next morning for Craigley, agreeably to the Baronet's desire. They arrived about noon, and a council was immediately held. In the meantime, the unsuspecting Rosara was endeavouring to conquer

quer her fatal passion; with smiles and forced spirits, she attempted to deceive her anxious father into a belief that it was already subdued. Alas! she had seen Sir George Meriton when he could be amiable—when he had really felt the tenderest love; and Mr. Courtland beheld with alarm that her affections were not to be recalled.

Previously to the adoption of any regular plan of attack, the party at Craigley had dispatched a servant to Cheshunt, to learn whether the Courtlands were, at that present time, at the vicarage. In the first place, he repaired to the inn where Sir George had been entertained the day before, and where he thought it not unlikely he should collect some useful information. His attention was presently amused by a discourse at
the

the bar, from which he learned some important particulars respecting a ball at a Mr. Hornby's. The person who was speaking, observed that her young mistress, Miss Hornby, would certainly eclipse even *Miss Courtland* herself in appearance that night.

"What, is Miss Courtland going?" demanded another voice.

"Oh, yes," replied the first speaker, "there's a large party dines at the vicarage to-day, and they all go together in the evening."

With this news the exulting emissary thought proper to return immediately to Craigley, and it was received with shouts of applause.

"Nothing could have happened more fortunate

fortunate for us," observed Selgrave. "In the first place, Will, do you return to the inn, and find out where Mr. Hornby lives." This fact being ascertained; we have nothing further to do but to repair thither at a seasonable hour of the evening, and, in the midst of the dance, spread such an alarm, as shall not only occupy the interest and attention of the whole company, but create the greatest confusion; during which, with proper management, we may easily decoy Miss Courtland into the carriage, which shall be at hand, and then the business will be done without any compulsion at all."

The Baronet highly approved of this advice. Darnley observed that the day was his own, and Melbank offered to lay a large wager that the pretty soul would

melt

melt before she had got half way to Basingstoke.

The worthy Mr. Courtland had always given his consent to Rosara's partaking in every amusement she was fond of; and at this particular time, he felt anxious that she should miss no opportunity that offered of beguiling the latent sorrows of her heart. The party that he had invited to dine with him (for he had invited one), was composed of three gentlemen and two young ladies, all engaged to the above-mentioned ball, and had been asked to dinner in consequence of a slight disinclination his lovely daughter had shewn to partake in the entertainment.

Rosara welcomed these friends with a smiling countenance; and as her fond
parent

parent had prophesied, with a heart incapable of occasioning disappointment, or giving offence, she cheerfully consented to accompany them to the ball, as it seemed their wish, and rose early from the table to prepare herself. But Rosara Courtland, blooming with every grace that health, happiness, and beauty could bestow, the comforter of the sick, the patroness of the poor, with the smile of peace and benevolence for ever playing on her cheek, and the children of fancy for ever sporting in her way, was no longer the same. A victim to sensibility, she was sinking under the weight that oppressed her; and though her cheerfulness remained, it was the divine offspring of resignation. The party took a walk till tea, when Rosara again appeared, elegantly equipped for the ball, and looking

ing more lovely and interesting than ever.

The evening was beautiful; and as the company had to renew their walk near two miles, Mr. Courtland proposed that they should set out immediately after tea, and he would himself accompany them part of the way. Being arrived within sight of Mr. Hornby's house, which was rurally situated at the bottom of a wood, Mr. Courtland took leave of all he held most dear.

“You will, doubtless, return early, my dear Rosara, and well defended; Mr. Hornby has promised to send you in his carriage, and I shall rely upon these gentlemen to see you safe home.”

Miss

Miss Courtland caught her father's hand, and pressed it to her lips; she appeared unusually agitated, and he perceived it.

“Why this agitation, my sweet girl?” cried he, tenderly; “if you really feel so great a dislike to fulfil your promise, return with me—your friends will excuse you.”

“No, no, my dear Sir,” replied she, “I shall be better presently; I am a little fatigued, that's all—my spirits will be enlivened by the ball.”

“I think so too,” rejoined her father, “or I should not have been so desirous of your going. God bless you! and take care you reserve sufficient to cheer me up for the rest of the week.—Thus they separated.

The

The demons that laugh at misery and oppression, stood ready to commence their torments; and the faithful ministers of their cruelty were summoned from Craigley to inflict them. Sir George Meriton, the once generous, compassionate, and even thinking Sir George, had, by swallowing copious and frequent draughts of wine, so completely choked up all the avenues that led to pity or restraint, that no libertine was better qualified to execute his dire commission; and the rest were equally prepared to encourage and support him. In this condition they sallied forth at a late hour, in two postchaises and four; the Baronet and Melbank in one, and Selgrave and Darnley in the other. Bill and his comrade had provided *proper* postillions to accompany them all the way, and every thing had been

been prepared at Bexfield for their reception.

Fate had now struck the blow. The third dance at Mr. Hornby's had already commenced, and it happened, unfortunately for poor Rosara, that she had preferred sitting down, and was, in consequence, left unattended by any gentleman; her former partner having been reduced to the necessity of taking out another lady. At this moment an alarm of *fire*, of all others the most dreadful, and attended with the most confusion, was spread all over the house. Rosara hastened from her seat, and mingled with the crowd that were endeavouring to force at once through the door-way, joining her feeble shrieks with the mingled tumult that resounded on all sides. Thus situated, incapable of reflection,

VOL. I. M reflection,

reflection, and deprived of her protector, who had reluctantly been compelled to leave her, she issued from the room with frantic haste, first following one party, and then another. At length she was met by Selgrave, whom, in her fright, she never thought of looking at, but joyfully accepted his arm, to extricate her from what she supposed her perilous situation.

“Fear nothing,” said he, “but come with me, and I will conduct you to a place of safety.”

For the first time she observed and recollected him; a dreadful suspicion shot across her mind, and she started back from him with horror.

Mr.

“Mr. Selgrave,” exclaimed she, “for the love of Heaven, leave me!”

“Not till you are safe from the flames,” replied he, hurrying her along.

He had now gained the entrance into the house, where he was met by Melbank, who, on the present occasion, displayed more ability than his companion thought he possessed; for Rosara having, by this time attracted particular notice, from her exertions to extricate herself from her supposed protector, *he* instantly assumed the situation; and after peremptorily demanding of the other why he dared force a young lady with him against her will, offered his own services to conduct her whithersoever she thought proper. As Melbank had the appearance of a gentleman, and was quite unknown to her, she flew to him with transport, thanked him

with tears for his protection, and entreated him to convey her any how to the vicarage. Though inflamed with wine, our *second in command* had not lost the whole of his dissimulation; but affecting great concern for her situation, modestly proposed carrying her thither *in his own carriage*, if she would honour him with her confidence. This proposal, which at any other time she would, from a stranger, have rejected, her fear of Selgrave made her rashly accept; whilst that gentleman, assuming a look of defiance, departed another way. Easy as this scheme had at first appeared to the projectors, it would, nevertheless, have failed, but for the intervention of some unlucky circumstances. In the first place, the detaching Selgrave as the decoyer, they were aware would be attended with considerable danger, as Miss Courtland knew

his

his connexion with Sir George; yet it was necessary to send him, as he was the only one of the *gang*, the Baronet excepted, who had ever seen, or could have known her. The event would have justified their apprehensions, but for the artifice of Melbank, who observed that a second on the expedition might prove of consequence; he therefore left his comrades, entirely ignorant at the time of what he was to do, or where he was to plant himself. His meeting with Selgrave and Rosara at the door of the house was merely accidental; but it was the only circumstance that could have accomplished their plans; for by that time the false alarm had been discovered, and peace restored;—nay, as Melbank was endeavouring all he could to prevent himself from *staggering* along with his deluded charge, they were met by two

gentlemen, one of whom Miss Courtland knew, and who strongly persuaded her to return to the ball; but feeling fatigued, and unwilling to appear unthankful to the *kind* stranger, she declined the offer, and they left her to her fate.

About eighty yards from the path which led into the wood from Mr. Hornby's house, was the road side where the carriages were stationed. To this place Selgrave had expeditiously returned with his successful intelligence, and the Baronet stood ready at the door of the chaise to seize his prey. The postboys were ready mounted—the horses impatient to be gone. As they approached the spot, Rosara started at the appearance of such a cavalcade; but before she had time to ask a question, or form a suspicion, she was hurried in by Melbank, who stepped in

in after her, and was followed by Sir George; when she soon perceived that she was not only travelling at an uncommon rate, but diametrically opposite to the road which led to the vicarage.

Unspeakable was the terror she now experienced. Hastily letting down the glass, she screamed to the postillions to stop; but they, had they been able to hear her, knew their cue. Then turning to Melbank—

“Oh Sir!” said she, in trembling and supplicating accents, “I fear, I fear you know we are going wrong. This is not the way to my father’s, my dear father’s house; return, if you would not see me die at your feet; return, and blessings innumerable will fall upon your head.”

There was something so strikingly pathetic in her manner of speaking, that the Baronet, for a moment, partook of all her sorrows, and even Melbank was touched.

“You deceive yourself, Miss,” said he; “we are going right enough; we are going the road of pleasure and happiness. Come, come, banish from your mind all these gloomy ideas, and think of the blessings Nature intended you should enjoy with the man who adores you, who would sacrifice his life and fortune to gain one encouraging smile.”

“Gracious Heaven!” exclaimed she, “then all is over, and I am lost for ever!”

“Not so,” replied Sir George, whose well-known voice roused her to a keener sense of anguish. “This little stratagem
you

you yourself have occasioned, by not favouring the letter I sent you with your perusal. In that, the cruel Rosara would have read, and been convinced of the rectitude of her lover's sentiments; nor have suffered the rigid scruples of a father, whose name, however, he still venerates, to deprive her of the happiness she was born to receive and dispense."

"I cannot think," replied she, in tremulous accents, interrupted by tears and sighs, that might have moved the boisterous winds to silence—"I cannot think you—you will, you can destroy me! You never loved me, Meriton, or would you thus, thus cruelly insult me?"

"Insult you, my dearest Rosara!" replied the Baronet; "by all the powers above, I have no anxiety on earth but to make you happy, to be dependant on

your will, to sacrifice every thing to your wishes."

"Oh then return—restore me to my distracted father! Without him there is no happiness on earth—without him I never can wish more, except for death. You once were kind, you once were generous:—Oh, then, Meriton, dear Meriton, return!"

"By Heaven!" replied Sir George, "you shall return to him; but can Rosara find no excuse for her distracted lover? To what asylum could he then fly for a relief from woe? Would she but consent to crown his wishes, and receive his eternal vows of constancy—vows too pure to mingle with the rhapsodies of priestcraft and prejudice, then might she return."

"Silence, blasphemer!" interrupted she, with the emphasis of offended virtue.

tue. Then recollecting her situation, and the unguarded expression she had used — “Sir George Meriton, I solemnly conjure you, by the yet unstained honour of your family, to desist from this violent, this insulting persecution. Believe me, Sir, your strongest arguments will be ineffectual to mislead me; my soul is above the enjoyment of those pleasures you speak of; and if you violate the purity of that soul, vengeance divine will overtake your miserable deed!”

The moon at that instant shot from a cloud, and beamed full upon her countenance;—the Baronet beheld it glistening with the tears that had fallen; her eyes were devoutly raised towards Heaven, and her hands pressed her palpitating bosom. He would have encircled her in his arms; but the guardians of Chastity were

hovering over her head, and prevented the profanation. He was awed, abashed, and even terrified at the energy of her manner. With some difficulty he pacified her for the present, by solemnly assuring her that, on the following day, he would restore her to her father, but that it was too late then to think of returning.

They had stopped to change horses once or twice; but Sir George had, by involving her in the bitterest reflections, prevented her from observing, till it was too late, that she might, by exerting herself, have gained perhaps her deliverance. Her strength was now so completely exhausted, that, had she attempted to cry out, her strongest efforts to be heard would have proved ineffectual. Overcome at length by a variety of wretched sensations,

sensations, she sunk into a stupor, which continued till the morning. They reached Bexfield about eight, after travelling at a furious rate all night.

The sun had emerged from a clear and beautiful horizon—the country looked delightful and picturesque; but to Rosara every scene, every varying prospect was wretchedness. Her afflicted parent was visible to her fancy on every hill and in every vale; she heard his lamentations in every sound, and every distant voice murmured—“Rosara, my lost Rosara!”

An elderly woman, in whose features were delineated strong traits of humanity, stood ready to welcome her master's visitors; she expressed no surprise at observing the pale countenance of Miss

Courtland, or the consternation she evidently betrayed.

“Mrs. Morrison,” said the Baronet, as he handed her from the carriage, “I must beg your immediate attention to this young lady, and you have, of course, prepared a room for her accommodation.”—Then turning to Rosara, and tenderly pressing her hand, he added, in a half whisper, “Rely upon my promise, and follow my housekeeper; she will provide you with every thing you wish for;—but, for Heaven’s sake! take some repose; may vengeance instantly pursue me if it shall be interrupted!”

Terrified more than assured by this imprecation, she followed Mrs. Morrison, somewhat revived by the gentleness of her conductor’s manner, and the respectability

respectability of her appearance. Mrs. Morrison was the wife of the old butler at the Abbey; they married in the service of the family, and were as equally attached to their late master as he had been to them. Rosara was ushered by this good woman through various suites of apartments, elegantly furnished, and came at length to the chamber which had been prepared for her reception. It was separated from the other apartments by a long passage, terminated by a door, and in the remotest part of the house. Rosara observed this; but flattering herself that the Baronet would at least refrain from absolute violence, and that he might possibly keep his promise, she made no objection to her room; and having, in consequence of Mrs. Morrison's solicitations, taken some refreshment, she undressed, and went to bed; the good
housekeeper

housekeeper assuring her she would bring her work, and sit by her all the time she slept. Where virtue exists, it is generally instinctive; and Mrs. Morrison, though first seen in the house of her betrayer, and delivered by him to her attention, appeared, in Rosara's eyes, what she really was—honest, affectionate, and compassionate.

Our heroine awoke about noon, very much refreshed, and received some consolation on being informed that the Baronet had only sent to enquire how she did, but had not once attempted to intrude upon her privacy, and was even ignorant that she had been so closely guarded. She now began to hope he really meant to restore her to her father, and she imparted this hope to Mrs. Morrison. Mrs. Morrison, having already
been

been made acquainted with her master's conduct regarding her, seemed to form doubts as to the probability of such a step at present.

“But, my dear young lady,” said she, “do not be alarmed; your father you will shortly see again—I'm sure you will; and as to Sir George, whatever arguments he may use to seduce your innocence, I'm confident he will never descend to violence.”

The Baronet, in the meantime, mustered his friends, and a council (only inferior in point of grandeur to that of Pandemonium) was held to resolve upon the decisive blow to be struck. Determined, as he had hitherto been, to effect his purpose, yet the dignified and inflexible resolution Rosara had shewn to reject
all

all his advances, and the sudden and severe indignation she had expressed at his libertine speeches in the carriage, kept his mind on the rack of impatience and uncertainty.

“What’s to be done?” began he.
“Miss Courtland will not even listen to *reason*; the words *prejudice* and *priestcraft* drew upon me the appellation of *blasphemer*.”

The members started.

“This is an indignity not to be endured,” said Darnley.

“I’d have *satisfaction*,” said Melbank.

“She should *struggle* for it,” said Selgrave.

“What do you mean?” answered Sir George.

“Mean!”

“Mean!” continued the last speaker, “why, that you should return good for evil, and *force* her to the enjoyment of her good fortune.”

The Baronet paused; a thousand thoughts came rushing to his heart to guard it from total corruption. Actual compulsion he had never intended; but what was the alternative? Was it in the power of love or opportunity to persuade? Perhaps it was; but then this must be the work of time; and what time was now allowed him? Would not Mr. Courtland immediately suspect the ravisher of his child? Would he not as immediately be convinced of the fact by concurring circumstances? His absence from London so suddenly—the return of Lovel, whose scrupulous integrity might overcome even his affection for his master;

the

the report of the gentlemen who had met Rosara with Melbank;—already he began to hear the pursuers, armed with indignant resolution, thundering at the gate. He started from his chair; he paced the room in frantic disorder!

“If they come,” exclaimed he, “I shall lose her—I shall never see her more! But then *force*. To break in upon her, unguarded and unbefriended, and with the strength of savage sensuality, to—No, gentlemen, by Heaven I cannot do it!”

“Why, no,” rejoined Darnley, “I hope there will be no occasion for that neither; I should think she would not prove *unreasonable* in the evening, when she is a little invigorated by a glass or two of wine, and you go to her, George, all blooming as you are, and find her reclining,

ing, perhaps, on the bed, full of tender wishes. Consider, the greatest of all arguments is in your favour; she *loves* you, she has you to herself—no fear of interruption, no possibility of a spy; use then thy rhetoric, and if it succeed not, trust me thy mistress has no more *soul* about her than a worm.”

This eloquent speech was highly applauded; both Selgrave and Melbank were of the same opinion, and advised the Baronet to wait with patience till the evening, when, properly fortified with wine, love, and perseverance, he might open his battery unmolested.

“We will keep a good *look out*,” continued Darnley, “and rot me if man or beast approaches to interrupt you, unless they chuse, one and all, to run the risk
of

of catching a *leaden* fever. As to the old woman, we will depute Melly, here, to guard her;—nay, never start, Melbank; you'll not be left like Meriton's chicken, 'unguarded and unbefriended;' if the old dragon should make a dart upon thy *innocence*, which, perhaps (not being possessed with Sir George's gentleness) she may, we will come to thy rescue."

"Well," replied the Baronet, resuming his seat, "it shall be so; this night shall decide my fate, or her's. As to Mrs. Morrison, I am going to dispatch her after dinner on *business of consequence* to one of my tenants; not that her absence is so material, but because my lovely girl may be convinced that silence and security reign around; and I have power not to be controuled.

CHAP. XV.

FROM this period till dinner time, the afflicted daughter of Mr. Courtland spent the heavy hours in tears and sighs. The consolations of Mrs. Morrison, though acknowledged with every demonstration of gratitude, were but feebly opposed to the heart-rending reflections that occupied her thoughts. Her father's grief for her loss, ignorant as he was of her real intentions, attributing her conduct, as he might do, to the sudden impulse of a misplaced affection—his alternate emotions

tions of anger, pity, doubt, and love tearing his heart, and imbittering the hours that, till then, had been wont to roll on with uninterrupted tranquillity—these dreadful suggestions of her mind she in vain endeavoured to beguile; she traversed her chamber, she observed the elegance of the furniture, of the pictures which hung over the chimney piece, but in vain. At length a bell summoned Mrs. Morrison away.

“Must you leave me?” cried the trembling sufferer.

“I will be back directly,” answered Mrs. Morrison; “but it is the parlour bell, and I am the only servant in the house, except the two *strange* men who accompanied your carriage, and who do not belong to the family.”

She

She shuddered.

“Come, don’t be alarmed,” continued the good woman; “I tell you again you have nothing to fear; trust in Providence, and he will protect you.”

Mrs. Morrison now left the chamber, and Rosara, in whom the sense of danger had inspired courage, suddenly thought of making her escape; but how was she to effect it unperceived? Sir George had, doubtless, placed spies over her; and had she not been led to the present apartment through a chain of rooms opening to the only staircase she was acquainted with in the house. She then ran to the window, but nothing like hope presented itself to her view. She beheld a beautiful grove of firs, interspersed with various other branching

VOL. I. N trees,

trees, which prevented her from observing to what asylum of safety it would lead, or how she could extricate herself from what appeared to her "a leafy labyrinth." Then to descend from the window would have been an impracticable task for the most athletic and dexterous man. She next explored her apartment for another door, through which she was determined, at all hazards, to pass; but here she was disappointed: except to a small closet, the room, though gloomily spacious, had but one entrance. She now repented that she had not objected to this chamber; and abandoning her project, returned to the window, and gave herself up to despondency.

Mrs. Morrison presently opened the door. Rosara beheld her pale and trembling, but at the same time endeavouring

ing to suppress her emotions;—her heart died within her, and she fell back in her chair in speechless agony. Mrs. Morrison, alarmed, threw open the window, and applied some lavender water to her temples. This restored her.

“ Good God, my dear Miss Courtland !” exclaimed she, “ why this agitation? Why will you not exert your fortitude? Summon it to your aid; confide in that Power who watches over innocence and virtue, and you are safe; if you disregard his assistance, you are lost.”

Rosara felt assured by this solemn admonition, and no less surprised by the manner in which it was given.

“ Oh Mrs. Morrison !” replied she, “ your looks betray some dreadful pre-

sages; I do, I *do* confide in Heaven; but, surely, if—if I could escape——”

“You abandon your confidence already,” replied Mrs. Morrison; “an escape is impossible; but I hope, I’m sure——” Here she was again interrupted by a bell.—“I must be gone,” resumed she; “I came to tell you dinner is ready; the Baronet neither wishes nor expects you to dine in the parlour, but hopes you will say what shall be sent you up; and, above all, admonishes you to recruit your spirits with a glass or two of wine. Lastly, he hopes you will not deny him the satisfaction of enquiring *personally* after your health when you have dined.”

“Never,” cried Rosara, trembling with indignant apprehension, “never will I see him more! Oh Mrs. Morrison! dear Mrs. Morrison! save me from him—do not abandon me to distraction!”

“You

"You are too distrustful," replied the housekeeper; "he cannot, he will not insult your sorrows by word or action; you must see him. Think of the danger of exciting his resentment. Your ready compliance may soften him into pity and tenderness: he will not be able to support your anguish; but if you contend against him, think, dearest young lady, think how ineffectual your resistance must prove!"

Dreadful as was the alternative, Rosara still felt it would be safer to consent to see Sir George, than to force him to an intrusion by a denial; she therefore resigned herself to her fate, and Mrs. Morrison left her to prepare her dinner.

Miss Courtland ate little; she drank a glass or two of wine, and felt her spirits

revived by it. Mrs. Morrison returned soon after, and removed the things.

“Well,” said she, “you look better now; continue to keep up your courage, and all will go well. I think you will see *your father* to-morrow, perhaps before.”

“Oh Mrs. Morrison!” exclaimed Rosara, “do not flatter me. Why do you think I shall be restored to him?”

Mrs. Morrison seemed anxious to impart something, but was again called away by a violent and repeated summons from her master’s bell.

The evening was now beginning to set in, and the twilight gloom, and the rustling of the trees, as she sat at the window surveying the imperfect landscape, were

ill calculated to sustain her spirits, or dissipate her reflections. The increasing darkness alarmed her; the breeze began to freshen, and rising clouds to announce an approaching storm. She rose from her seat, and rang the bell; it was for Mrs. Morrison. A confused murmur almost immediately succeeded, and she caught, at intervals, the gleam of an approaching light. Presently the door of the gallery opened; she heard it gently closed and locked. Her agony became now almost insupportable; she hastily threw up the window, and the rushing gale prevented her from fainting. A soft knock at the door convinced her this person could not be Mrs. Morrison, and the dreadful caution which had been observed, too plainly announced the Baronet. She started from her seat, and lifting her hands to Heaven, exclaimed—

“To thee, Oh Father of mercy! and to thy will I submit; support and save me in this hour of danger.”

Then recovering herself, she went to the door, and opened it. It was Sir George; his dress was discomposed, his eyes fiery and red; it was plain he had been drinking, but there were other rebellious passions raging in his heart, and which betrayed themselves in his countenance. Rosara shrunk from him with horror; that face she had been wont to view with rapture and delight, she now turned from with disgust. Vice had deformed every feature, and spread over them a gloomy and unrelenting fierceness. He approached. The only candle he had brought with him shot a melancholy gleam around. Rosara sunk into a chair in a state of agonizing terror.

“Why

“Why all this foolish alarm?” said Sir George, as he took her trembling hand, and seated himself by her. “With your *own consent* I am come, and to convince you, if possible, how widely you have been misled in your pursuit after happiness. By my soul, Rosara, I love you with that purity, I would not for the world ensnare either your peace or *liberty*——”

“Sir George Meriton,” interrupted she, “I before told you, and I repeat my assertion, there is no argument in the power of man to devise that can make me swerve from my original principles. The *liberty* you set such a value upon is hateful to my soul—it is a liberty that would enslave it. If you would not deprive me of liberty, restore me to my father, restore me to my cottage, to my innocence; nor let it be said that the
last

last of an illustrious family sullied the ancient honour of his House, by driving to infamy and despair the unsuspecting friends that loved, *and once preserved him.*"

"Miss Courtland," replied Sir George, "was it fair to say you loved, and then disgrace your disappointed lover? Was it kind to trifle with his passion, and, by a freezing and contemptuous indifference, send back his letter unopened? In what way am I to be recompensed for the pangs I then felt and still feel? 'Tis plain you trifled, cruelly trifled with me; 'tis plain you never loved, else would you so soon, unmindful of my sorrows, have sought to make new conquests at a ball? Must I tamely suffer the punishment you have inflicted? Can you think it, Rosara? yet, by Heaven, *my* love is undiminished. I court you to redress my grievances, by
giving

giving and receiving every blessing life is capable of bestowing. Oh, then, let me seal on those lovely lips our reconciliation—let me snatch you to my panting heart!”

“Away!” interrupted our heroine, tearing herself from his arms, which had encircled her. “Oh Mrs. Morrison, where, where are you? You told me to confide in Heaven! Now, then, now I kneel!” and she dropped, with uplifted hands, upon her knees.

The Baronet was moved, but compassion soon gave way to other sensations. Her disordered dress, the ringlets flowing on her lovely neck, the expression of her eyes, and the beauty of her form, were exposed to the sensual libertine, not to the generous lover.”

“Silly

“Silly girl!” exclaimed he, again encircling her, now incapable of resistance, in his licentious arms, “banish this illusion, this visionary hope. Mrs. Morrison is far off; my friends and servants are all dispersed abroad, and nought but love and glorious opportunity reign here. Catch, then, the fleeting moments, and be happy!”

A tremendous clap of thunder followed this speech; the winds howled along the grove, and the rain pelted heavily against the window. Unmindful of this warning, Sir George was pursuing his infamous purposes, when, inspired by sudden and almost supernatural energy, she sprang from his arms, and pointing to Heaven, from whence the blue lightning was flashing at quick and dreadful intervals, she exclaimed, “Tremble!”

“Tremble!”

"Tremble!" echoed a hollow and awful voice from the other end of the room. Sir George dropped his lovely burthen, and stood motionless, with dismay. Rosara, pale, wild, and trembling, staggered to a chair, into which she sunk silent and panic-struck.

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed the Baronet, "what prodigy is this?" Then recollecting himself—"But 'tis some trick. Think not, Madam," turning to Rosara, "this device will succeed."—Then taking up the candle, he carefully examined the apartment; he looked under the bed, upon it, and within it; nothing was to be seen. He had double-locked and bolted the door, so that no one could have stolen in during their conversation. Again he felt dismayed.

"'Tis very strange!" continued he; "but I will discover this mystery, or disappointment be my portion!"

Then

Then hastily quitting the chamber, he made fast the door on his devoted victim, and rushing along the passage, secured that entrance likewise. Descending hastily the staircase, he met Mrs. Morrison; agreeably to our hero's plan, she had been dispatched on a frivolous errand to one of his tenants. She was wet and exhausted.

"Quick, tell me," said he, "who resides at Bexfield besides yourself?"

"You know, Sir George," replied Mrs. Morrison, "I am the only servant. The old gardener, who did live in your service, is dead."

"And have you no acquaintance or relation that occasionally visits you, and has been here to-day?"

"None, Sir."

He then hastily left her, and repaired to his friends, whom he found still carousing

sing over the bottle, and Bill and Timothy at their posts on the lawn, ready to give the alarm, should any of Rosara's pursuers be at hand. The Baronet was thunderstruck, and taking Selgrave apart, informed him of the mysterious interruption he had met with.

Selgrave paused.—“Is there no communication between that apartment and another?” asked he.

“None,” replied our hero; “only a closet, which I have examined. It is separated by a long gallery from every other room, and surrounded by trees.”

“You have left Miss Courtland alone,” remarked the other; “may she not take advantage of the night and your confusion?”

“I have double-locked and bolted each door; she cannot escape.”

“But

“But there’s a *window*, I take it, Baronet, “and women are sometimes desperate in defence of this bugbear, virtue.”

Sir George shuddered at the idea; he snatched up a candle, and flew to the gallery; all was as he had left it. He unlocked the first door, and moved softly along till he came to her chamber; all was silent as death. He looked through the key-hole; the candle was still burning;—twice he called Rosara—no answer was returned. The dreadful supposition of self-destruction now rushed upon his mind; scarcely had he power to open the door. He beheld the chamber as he had left it, but Rosara was gone!

END OF VOL. I.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.